

NOVEMBER

25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



"Waiting Is the
Tough Job"...Painted by
HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

Room 40, O. B.

A complete book-length novel
by **DENISON CLIFT**

Dead Man's Hat

A mystery novelette
by **MICHAEL GALLISTER**

Counterclockwise

The first of a new series
by **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

Who's Who *In this Issue*

Denison Clift

BORN in San Francisco, Denison Clift took his B.A. from Stanford; immediately upon graduation he became the last editor of the Bret Harte-famed *Overland Monthly*. Then, five years of short-story writing for national magazines, including *Blue Book* and *Redbook*, and playwriting, led to an association with Cecil De Mille and a long career as writer and director in Hollywood.

He has published four novels, had two plays produced in New York by A. H. Woods, and two in London; and has two new plays, "Gallows Hill" and "Men Coming Home," scheduled for Broadway this season. Spent several years in London writing and directing, and finished up with a trip around the world in search of fresh literary material.

Again in London when war broke in 1939, Denison Clift uncovered the intriguing processes of the greatest code-room in the world—known as "Room 40 O.B."—of the British Admiralty. Developed the novel, a mystery-spy-adventure thriller which begins on page 111.



Frederick Way, Jr.

FOR seventeen years, ever since Frederick Way, Jr., threw away his books at Carnegie Tech and took a river job, he has been standing in pilothouses, lining up the jackstaff with a shore point. He knows river life well, having lived it, painted it, and written it. Especially he knows the Allegheny, for both sides of his family have lived in the valley for well over a hundred years.

Mr. Way was born in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, on February 17, 1901. His parents encouraged his love of the river at first, but they hardly approved of it as a career. They sent Frederick to Carnegie Tech and to the University of Cincinnati in the hope of making an engineer of him. But the lure of the river was too great, and Frederick began to work his way up to becoming a packet-boat pilot. Today, his dream realized, he has enriched the folklore of America with his books about rivers and river life, "The Allegheny," "The Log of the Betsy Ann" and "Pilotin' Comes Natural."



Maurice Bower

I WAS born in Ohio of Philadelphia parents, and so was quickly brought back to that City of Brotherly (?) Love. As long as I can remember, I have been trying to draw pictures (started at age three, so they tell me) and, save for a brief military interlude in 1917-'18, have been at it ever since. I studied at the School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia, was fortunate enough to catch on early with the national magazines, and so was able to transfer my studio to Paris, where I had an unbelievably happy five years before the world went completely haywire. The quest for pictorial material has led me over pretty much all of Europe and the Mediterranean countries, and I have never been able to recover from what used to be called wanderlust. My chief ambition still seems to be, as Kipling puts it, "For to admire and for to see, for to be old this world so wide!"

Let's see. . . . Oh, yes, I first met my wife in Paris, where she was drawing fashions. . . . And now our boy is flying in the Naval Air Force, which brings us up, with a jerk, to *today!*



BLUE BOOK

November, 1943

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READERS' COMMENT*

OVERSEAS EQUIPMENT

The other day I got into a conversation with a tough old sergeant who had just returned from active duty in the Solomon Islands area. Since I haven't been overseas yet, I asked for advice about what personal belongings to take when we are shipped.

This is what he had to say:

"Son, it isn't the action that gets you, but the eternal waiting for something to happen. Since there isn't anything else to do you have to devise a way to spend your leisure time. I spent mine in reading—and got a lot of relaxation from it.

"If you're wise you will take several copies of any good magazine, such as BLUE BOOK, along. A BLUE BOOK is worth its weight in gold during those lonely evening hours."

So it seems your great magazine is doing more than its share in helping those of us who are or will be overseas. BLUE BOOK is tops with the Army.

Corporal Darrell Roberts,
Arcadia, California.

AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

I have for years protested "prophetic stories"—stories of the future. I think most of them are plain buncombe, because so few ever materialize. But the July issue of your magazine had a story of "Quest, Inc.," that attracted me, for the simple reason that in another publication there appeared an article on the earthquake due in Japan. In other words, if this scientific article bears fruit, your story will have called the turn! This is the one and only time I have been eagerly engrossed in such a "prophetic" story!

I sincerely believe BLUE BOOK has an aim, and that it is useful. If we continue to have such stories, based upon actual predictions which science really backs, then we have a magazine not only with an eye to the future, but a magazine that knows, through knowledge of the world, what is coming—and that is entertainingly attractive. It is my hope that BLUE BOOK will continue to carry such prophetic tales, with basic backgrounds.

Montgomery Mulford.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned; and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

The Devil Calls on

THE portrait was so real that Susanna seemed to walk straight into the room, as she did when this house was surrounded by cow country instead of orange groves. In her flounced purple dress and bustle, she belonged definitely in that adobe-walled old house even though the portrait had originally hung in a saloon.

Janet's father never told much about this ravishing, red-haired lady except that she was his grandmother and always got what she wanted. She got a lot, judging from those jewels in the picture and that shawl from India and the fan of silk and Mexican silver. But the whole truth about her was something that Janet's father kept secret. He kept it up his sleeve. It was a card he intended to play the very first time that Janet asked his advice about the choice of a husband.

There was only one trouble with this scheme. Janet never asked his advice.

He resolved to play the card, however, when he overheard her phoning. "No, it won't do any good talking it over, Tom," she was saying. "I'll send the ring back. Maybe Dad will drop by with it tomorrow. . . . No, Tom. You said all that when you sold your seedlings and sweets. Now you're picking the Valencias when you had a chance at an officers' training camp. You'll wait to sell the navel oranges next, and then you'll enlist—maybe. . . . What? All right, good-by!"

"Finished him off just right," her father said, coming in from the veranda.

"I'm glad you heard it!" Janet said. "And I wish you'd heard his side of it. He can't drop his business just because I want to see how fine he'd look in a uniform! How do you like that! He says his mother can't take care of the grove and decide when to sell or pick or smudge—and a lot of other alibis. He's just stalling, hoping there'll be some exemption for ranchers, I know. I'm through with him!"

"Glad to hear it," her father said. "You've worked yourself into a nervous breakdown, and I don't blame you at all. You're a girl of high principles just like that lady up there—"

"Principles?" Janet said, glancing at the portrait. "I thought Gammy Susanna—"

"Now, wait: don't jump at conclusions. Perhaps I ought to say it was



"When Bill Starr took his hand out from under the lapel, his palm was dripping red."

the man she chose for a husband who had the high principles. And it's what you want in your husband, I mean—isn't it?"

"I don't want any husband. I'm not going to get married, ever. I'm through."

"What if you met a man like Gammy Susanna's husband, who shot seven bandits on his wedding-day?"

Janet turned. "That's not bad! I'll tell Tom that, if he rings up again. A lot of shooting he'd do! He's going to ring up in ten minutes, if I know anything. I'll tell him the kind of husband I want, and he isn't it."

"Tell him you want a man like Gammy Susanna chose—a man of character when most men in those Gold Rush days were bad—roaring rich or roaring drunk all the time. But this Abner Brackett, he had ideals, and money too."

"Was he good-looking?"

"Good-looking! His mule trains started out through Cahuenga Pass right where the picture studios are now. If he'd been born three generations later, he'd be in the same spot—in the pictures! But it was his character that was important and of course, I'll have to admit, his success freighting beef to the mines. Gammy Susanna was no fool about that, because she was penniless. It took her four years to catch him—and do you know why?" He pointed to the picture. "Because of that devil that kept looking out of Susanna's eyes!"

Janet looked up at the girl in the portrait—a very thin, young girl with a lurid touch to her lips, and cheekbones that made her green eyes slant.

Susanna

A tale of the old wild days in California
by Kenneth Perkins



Janet gave a start. But that was because the phone rang. "You answer it, Dad. If it's Tom, tell him I'm not at home. Tell him I've decided to wait four years for just the right man."

"She's not at home, Tom," her father said into the phone. "And anyway, she's just got a hunch about waiting awhile. Told me so this very minute. . . . What? . . . She said, four years. . . . I'm just kidding? It's not my funeral. Good-by." He hung up.

"He says he's coming anyway, soon as his picking crew goes home. And he asked what the dickens I was talking about."

"You were talking about Gammy Susanna's eyes," Janet said indifferently.

"Ah, yes, and the devil. You see, she lived with two strait-laced old aunts, and they chased the devil out of her by making her work. It made her a fit wife, too. She had to keep this house spotless when there was a brea roof up there, that dripped tar all the

time. And of course they never let her look at a man or hear the fandangos you heard in all these *ranchos*. If a man did happen to come here, he couldn't even smoke, because Susanna might catch a whiff of it and remember her dad."

"Remember—what!"

"You see, her dad used to bring her gifts like those up there in the picture. But the aunts wouldn't let her wear them. Sold them all when he died."

"Yes, but you're leaving out something. You say they wouldn't let her remember her dad!"

"Not if she was to marry Abner Brackett. You never heard it, perhaps, but Susanna's dad was a professional gambler! And in the toughest town in the West—I mean Los Angeles. But of course he kept his daughter out of it, and bought this house for her and let the two aunts handle her."

"Selling her dad's presents!" Janet said. "I'd have kicked them out of this house!"

"I think she had that in mind. But the wedding-day came, and she was free of them anyway. Brackett had invited his friends—sea captains, supercargoes, cowmen, even a Spanish don or two. Of course Brackett was the first one to get here on that day—hours ahead of time. My grandmother was busy bleaching her freckles with leaves from that madrone tree in our patio. Being a red-head, she had freckles. But when she sifted starch through fine cambric for face-powder, her aunts squawked: 'What do you think this house is, a honky-tonk?'"

"They objected to her wedding dress, too. She made all her own clothes as well as her aunts', so she was an expert. In fact, that wedding dress was so smart, they made her tone it down by fixing her hair like a Madonna's, parted in the middle squaw-fashion. And they told her to go out to the pump and wash that powder from her face.

"She was alone at the pump—out there where the tank-house is now—when a haggard man, about her father's age, rides up and slumps from his saddle."

"The villain!"

"Not exactly. I'd say he was the devil coming back. He had such an air about him that Gammy Susanna always started her account of the wedding-day by describing every wrinkle—he had a lot of them and they were deep and dusty. And there was dust on his beaver hat and frock coat and velvet vest. He tipped the plug hat and asked if he could change horses—for his own skewbald was tuckered out and blowing. He took a lot of gold slugs from his money-belt—octagonals, they called them.

"Gammy Susanna was scared because he stared at her so hard. She could tell he was an American, but he stood the way Spanish Californians used to stand in the presence of a lady, with one hand under his lapel. It reminded her of her dad, because he always stood that way and talked gently to women or ranchhands. She was speechless, until her bridegroom came to the rescue."

"AND saw her in her wedding dress!" Janet exclaimed.

"He just had time to give her a look before the aunts chased her into the house. Then they scowled at the stranger and at the whisky-jug on his saddlehorn. They saw his hot eyes and the way he swayed back and forth, trying to stand up straight like a gentleman. 'You're drunk, aren't you?' one of the aunts said. 'And who are you, anyway!'

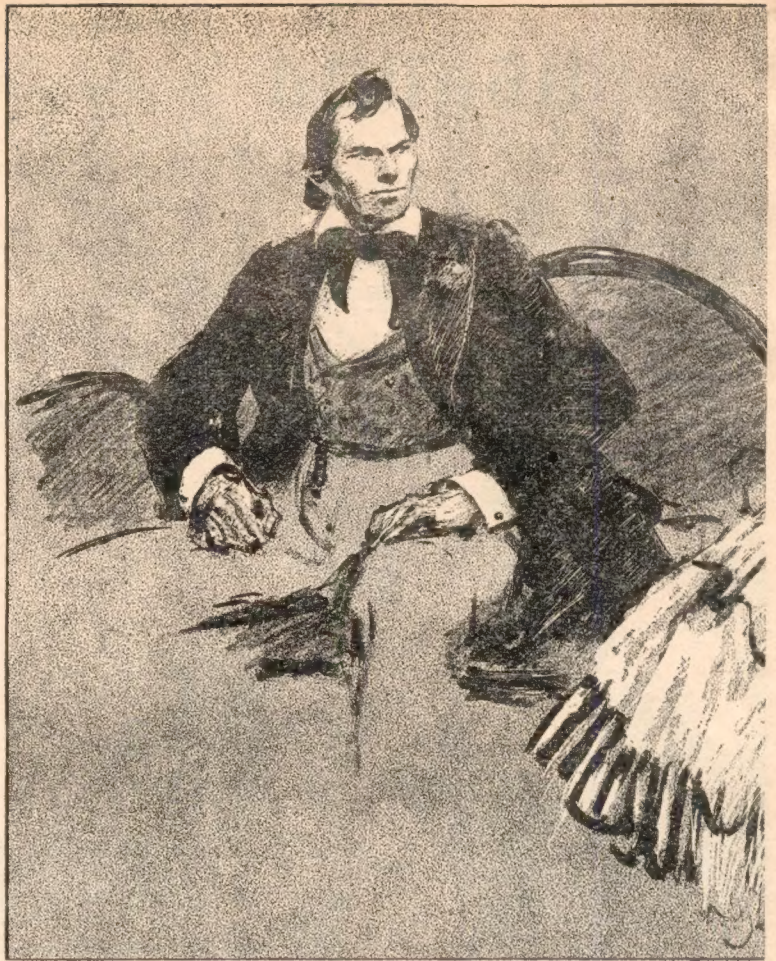
"My name's Bill Starr, ma'am. And I turn faro for Alec Gibson's house on the Plaza."

"A professional, h'm!" Aunt Priscilla tapped her foot. 'Get off this ranch!'

"If I can just water my horse. He's badly stove-up—"

"Then water him at the next saloon you're heading for!" the other aunt snapped.

"Gammy Susanna always acted those lines pretty well. And she always enjoyed telling how Abner Brackett came through as the Good Samaritan. 'Better change to one of my horses, pilgrim. Not the roan—the black gelding yonder.' You see, when Brackett came to his wedding, he had



two horses, as well as a Mission Indian for a hostler.

"When Bill Starr went to uncinch, he took his hand from under the lapel, and his palm was dripping red. He uncinched all right, but the weight of the saddle pulled him down to his knees in a faint.

"Susanna saw it all, and ran out of the house to help, but they sent her back to boil water. It was Brackett who helped him into the house. The aunts raised hob. 'Bringing a professional gambler into the guest-room! And with everybody coming to the wedding! Oh, no!' All these adobes had guest-rooms, and next to it,"—he pointed to what was now the breakfast nook—"that was where they kept milk-crocks and lard firkins and such. They took the wounded man in there, and Susanna brought in the boiling water, a horse blanket and a pillow.

"The minute they got his frock coat off, he lit a *cigarillo*. It smoked the aunts out. 'It smelled good!' my grandmother always told us."

"But who was he?" Janet asked.

"First let me tell you how she nursed him, because that's where

Gammy Susanna always held us in suspense, before we were supposed to know who he was. His wound had already been doctored before he came here, but his main medicine was whisky—that stuff that makes a man feel young and look old, as my grandmother put it. She washed the wound with vinegar and ground chili, and when she had it bound, she put an old coat over his chest to warm him. It was a dragoon coat her dad had worn when he first came to California with Stephenson's Volunteers."

"I know all about that coat," Janet said. They still had this heirloom tucked away with moth-balls in the cedar chest. "But go on."

"Then Susanna said: 'Now I'll fix you a hot drink. You're shivery.' But he said a tumbler of whisky would fix him just right. 'We don't allow hard liquor on this outfit. I'll fix you a stewed Quaker,' she said. 'It'll do you good instead of evil.'

"She had inherited a poker face from her father, but Bill Starr could read poker faces. He knew she was going to sneak his whisky-jug in somehow. But when she came back, she



had a drink in a china cup—molasses and butter pepped up with ginger. 'I tried to get your liquor, but Aunt Prissy broke the jug. Rightly too.'

"He took the drink, and some of the drawn look left his face. It certainly worked a miracle of good instead of evil! Then Gammy Susanna told him: 'The reason they don't want gamblers around is because of me. Aunt Prissy caught me playing monte with the old vet once, but she took the deck. It was a Spanish deck, because that's what you play monte with—' She checked herself, realizing she was on the wrong track. 'It was my dad's deck, and they burned it.'

"That's like burning a mother's Bible!" he said.

"That's how I felt." But Gammy Susanna contradicted herself: 'Card-playing is evil. For a woman, anyway. A woman must work.'

"Not a woman built in your image!" he said. 'God built you to dance!'

"Dance! Not on this *rancho*! Even music is bad, because it stirs you up; but hard work calms you. Why, all I could do when my aunts came here

was play the banjo. They broke the banjo, same as they broke your jug.'

"Gammy Susanna said that his eyes looked at her, half-closed, exactly like her dad would look at a player and stack up his hand. This Bill Starr, she said, stacked her up exactly. She was spirit-broke, saying things like a parrot, words that had been hammered into her."

"So he kidnaped her," Janet said.

"If you think that's the ending, you're way off. The *digueño*—Brackett's horse-keeper—came to that door there. He told Brackett that there'd been a raid at Hogan's *rancho*—that was up toward the Pomona Valley. Sam Hogan had just been paid for his beef herd. And let me tell you how many gold slugs a thousand cows brought in those Gold Rush days. Seventy dollars a head! It was Pico's bunch of horsethieves, Cahuilla Indians and some of his cronies who were fancy dressers like Pico himself. Nineteen of them, and all they had to fight at Hogan's ranch were some women and kids and only two grown-up men who could do any shooting. Nineteen against two!

"They stole some horses and mules; and one of them, the only brave one, got into the house and swept a stack of gold octagonals from the table. Then the bunch scattered, half of them wounded and some of them dead! When the Indian told all this to Brackett, they went out to look at the fugitive's horse. It was jiggered from a wild ride, as you know, and the brand on it was Hogan's brand!"

"I knew he was a bandit," Janet said. "You gave it away too soon."

"But I'm telling you this the way my grandmother always told it. They wouldn't let her go into the room to nurse him any more. But she peeked in and saw him sleeping—like a coyote, she said, with one eye open. He gave a start when she looked in, and dragged himself up on an elbow to look across the windowsill. He was watching for pursuers, she knew."

"WHY didn't they turn him over to the Sheriff?" Janet asked.

"That's just what they decided to do. But Brackett didn't want any gun shooting, not on his wedding-day and with his bride in the thick of it. He just let him sleep while the Indian rode down to the Pueblo for Cap Hope's Los Angeles Rangers. Susanna didn't know this until she saw a cloud of dust far off on the bench there—riders heading for the ranch. Then she went straight in and told Starr that if he was worried about being tracked here, to take a look out of the window!"

"Good for her!" Janet commented.

"He took out his card deck and began to shuffle it, just the way Susanna's dad used to do whenever he was excited. She said when he cascaded the cards from his good hand into the wounded one, it made a sound she remembered from the old days when her dad used to come home here. The professional whirr of the cards was like a harpstring, she said. But right while those riders were coming, he looked at her wedding dress again. 'You're the loveliest thing the eye of man has ever seen!'

"She forgot about the riders herself and stammered something about the dress he was staring at. 'The sleeves aren't long enough—my aunts said so. I've got to fix them before the wedding, so I—I can't stay here talking to you—'

"But wait! You mustn't wear sleeves at all. With bare arms, you'd be like an angel just alighted from heaven. And your hair should be in four parts, not just one."

Janet looked up at the portrait. "I see! He wanted it like that!"

"And another thing." He took off his watch-chain from his velvet vest. 'Wear this around your neck.' It was a chain of nuggets from the Gold



Her father said, "You're a girl of high principles just like that lady up there—"

Washings, and she made a pretty good guess he'd stolen them. 'It's not in payment for the care you've given me,' he said; 'it's just something you can remember me by.'

"I need nothing," she said. 'I'll remember you anyway.'

"A pretty good line," Janet said. "But I hope she dressed the way he told her."

"She wouldn't take the nuggets, of course. Instead she backed away—right into Abner Brackett who was at the door with a gun in each hand.

"Brackett said to Bill Starr: 'Going somewhere, pilgrim?'

"'To town—for a big drink.' Starr kept shuffling cards.

"'You aren't drinking anything for quite some time, pilgrim.' Brackett told Susanna to reach to the man's holster and get his gun out. But she had just heard that harpstring. 'Let him finish shuffling,' she said. 'I like the sound of it.' Bill Starr made the cards sing; then when he put the deck in his pocket, his hand came out with a little gun invented not long before by a man named Derringer."

"Swell!" Janet cried.

"But here's the joke. The gun was empty! He had shot off every bit of

lead he had in that raid over at Hogan's rancho!"

Janet said: "Brackett didn't kill—"

"Abner Brackett was no fool. He was going to get married. And the professional gambler was bluffing too well. Brackett dropped his two batteries—as pistols were called. He was no gun-shooting fool!"

"Not a very romantic husband, if you ask me," Janet said.

"Oh, you want romance? I admit good sense isn't always romantic, but it's what Brackett needed right then. He let the gambler walk right past him. And the aunts let him go, too—as good riddance. Aunt Priscilla was on her knees, terrified and gibbering prayers. Starr said something then that Gammy Susanna wrote down in her diary—every word. I've read it and know it by heart.

"'May your prayers always be answered, ma'am, because you are a very good woman!' That's what he said to Aunt Priscilla. 'You have done something which will be put in a book of saintly deeds. You took a girl whose long suit was banjo-playing and trained her to be a perfect wife—for somebody! Any man in California would be lucky to have her. I would

give all the gold in the Mother Lode to be that man!'"

Janet looked up at the portrait on the wall. The slim red-headed girl was the highest color in the room—as vivid as the living Janet herself. "I'll bet she wished that bandit was young enough to pack her off!"

"Quite likely that occurred to her. You see, he was just like her father. Which reminds me, you never knew it perhaps, but those professional gamblers down in the Pueblo were looked up to by everybody. Their word was good; they were straight shooters; some were rich like the famous Jack Powers; and of course some rode with the Bad Bunch and turned outlaw—generally because of some justifiable killing over cards. Just the same, this Bill Starr and Gammy Susanna and her dad were all three birds of the same feather, as she always called it."

"He should've been best man at the wedding, anyway," Janet said.

"Oh, no! He had to leave this house as fast as Susanna could saddle a horse for him. It was Brackett's horse—the one he'd offered, remember? When Starr said good-by, he slipped the string of nuggets into her hand, but she didn't notice it because something he'd just said astonished her. He called her something her dad used to call his wife before she died—I mean Susanna's mother. He said, 'Adios, Red!'"

"And then came the wedding!"

"Yes. She was married that night. The wedding guests came from all over the San Gabriel Valley, from the Mission and from the Pueblo too, ranchers and dons—and those Rangers Brackett had sent for."

"Why didn't they chase the bandit?" Janet asked logically.

"I'll tell you why—that's easy! The Rangers knew all about what he'd done. He was at the raid at Hogan's, yes—playing poker! Whenever Sam Hogan sold his beef herd, he'd invite his friends in for a sky-limit game. The bandit, Pico, knew about it. When he raided the game, Starr was the only one who stayed to help his friend Sam Hogan out."

Janet's eyes glowed. "Stayed to help a friend! That's something like it!"

"But after the fight, some of Pico's gang trailed him, knowing they'd wounded him, and guessing rightly enough that he'd won a lot in that poker game. That's why he kept watching for pursuers over there across the San Gabriel wash—"

JANET'S father stopped suddenly. "Hello! There's Tom driving across the wash, right now!"

Janet was flustered for only a moment. "All right, I'll talk to him. He's going to hear all about the kind of man I want, a real man like Bill

Starr. But," she added coolly, "tell him to wait on the veranda till I'm good and ready."

Her father greeted Tom and asked him to have a seat on the porch swing. "Janet will be right out."

"Tell her to take her time," Tom said cheerily. "She's getting me in training to wait. But tell her I won't wait any four years!"

Janet said, when her father came back: "It doesn't make sense, quite. When Bill Starr first came here to get a fresh horse, why didn't he explain he'd helped a friend in a raid?"

"That shows you don't know your California history. This bandit, Salomón Pico, was a relative of the last Governor, and he had a lot of friends among the ranch-owners all the way down to San Diego. That's how he got to be our worst bandit and was never caught. When Bill Starr came here, he wasn't going to tell perfect strangers how he'd fought Pico! And that dust-cloud on the bench—when Brackett tried to hold him up, Starr thought it was Pico's bunch coming for him! Instead, it was the Rangers, and they told everyone at the wedding what I've just told you."

"He should've come back and had the laugh on those aunts!" Janet protested.

"He didn't come back. But he had the laugh on them—in his own sweet way. Susanna knew he had ridden out of her life, but he'd left his mark on her! She ripped those sleeves off, first thing! And then she did her hair like that up there, only she perfumed it first with rosewood in sage tea. And her corset with its cast-iron breast-guard—she took that off! Jumped the style a few generations!"

"I'm beginning to see her!" Janet said gleefully.



"The digueño told Brackett that there'd been a raid at Hogan's rancho."

"The guests waited in this room here which was called the *sala*, the same as in all the *ranchos*. And the aunts were having a last heart-to-heart talk with the bridegroom in that patio wing next to your room, which was Susanna's room. That's how she happened to hear Brackett's voice."

"There is no longer any gossip about the devil in Susanna's eyes," Brackett was saying to the aunts, "for which you two godly women are to be thanked. When they talk of her now, the talk is of her skill with the needle, her cookery, her passion for work. A frontier wife must work. There is no time for play in this gold-mad, godless country, especially for a gambler's daughter."

"Right then Susanna put that chain of nuggets around her throat."

"She heard one of the aunts say anxiously: 'You'll remember your promise, that if we made Susanna a fit wife, we will not be left uncared

for—two spinsters in a country of bandits and Cahuillas? Well, we have made her fit!'

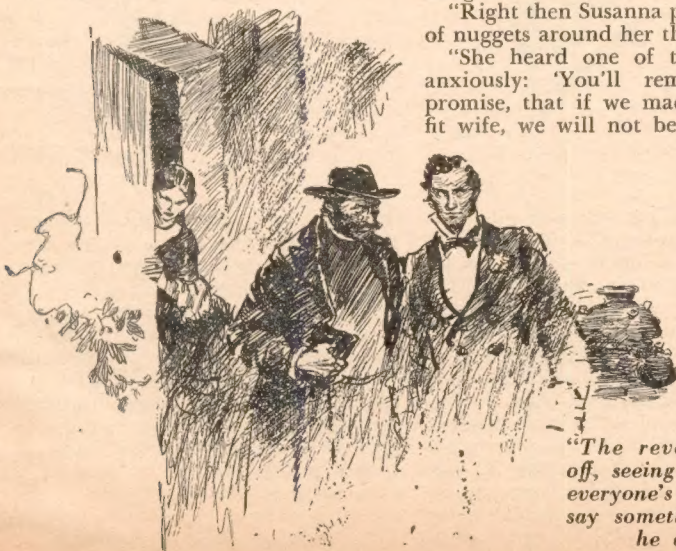
"Fit or unfit, I love her and I am taking her for better or for worse. I shall forget her father, and she must forget that he ever existed on this earth. But we shall not forget you two good women, or your years of work in molding Susanna. You are to live with us in my house!"

"That's where I'd have quit," Janet said.

"It was too late for that. The minister rode into the corral, and Brackett and everybody went out to greet him. He was the only minister anywhere around—the one who'd made a church out of the old Eldorado saloon in Los Angeles. I think he was the Reverend Bland, but that isn't important. The important thing is that he'd just passed Bill Starr on his way down to the Pueblo! Gammy Susanna opened her door a crack so she could listen."

"I saw that Bill Starr was wounded," the reverend said. "So I got off my horse to minister to him. It was just across the wash a few miles from here. He asked me for whisky before he knew who I was. He needed a drink bad, he said, and was trying to get to the nearest *cantina*, but his horse was spavined. He swore frightfully about it. He said a man who'd pretended to befriend him had sold him that horse for ten octagonals! Then this precious friend, thinking him a bandit, had sent for the Rangers to capture him, hoping for the reward." The reverend broke off, seeing the look on everyone's face. "Did I say something funny?"

"He'd said something funny, all right! The precious friend he was talking about was the bridegroom at this very wedding where he was going to officiate! Susanna didn't believe



"The reverend broke off, seeing the look on everyone's face. 'Did I say something funny?' he asked."

Illustrated by
John Fulton



what she heard. She wanted to come to Brackett's defense and shout out to them all that he had *given* Starr that horse. But she was in the middle of dyeing her eyebrows with bruised cloves.

"The muddled minister changed the subject. 'Too bad about Bill Starr,' he said. 'A sinner, but—you've all heard about the raid? Sam Hogan says Starr was given a chance to get out of the fight. Pico even offered him a bribe to stay out. But Bill Starr loves the smell of smoke and gun-oil! He killed seven of Pico's men! There'd be joy in heaven saving one sinner like that!'

"'Joy is right!' Susanna sang to herself. 'And I'm the one that's going to save him! She'd had time to think! Of *course* Brackett had taken gold slugs for that spavined horse! He

did it when he packed Starr into that room and Susanna went to boil water!

"'Wanted a drink—that's all he wants—and wanted to get to town for more drinks!' Susanna said, staring at herself in the mirror, for she was ready now. 'And he wants those hurrah girls too! They make a lot over him, I'll bet a gold slug! Just as they did over my dad—both of 'em being that handsome!' Yes, he was handsome; Gammy Susanna had found that out as soon as his liquor wore off and his face muscles took shape again after she wiped off that gray dust.

'He's worth saving! And he's wounded, out there in the sage with a spavined horse, trying to get to town! Ought to be in bed!'

"There was just half an hour before the wedding, and Gammy Susanna knew she could ride across the wash and back in time. Her main idea, I think, was to bring him back, knowing that these Rangers and skipers were the kind who would give him a rousing welcome. They might even rustle a drink somewhere. Anyway, she'd need more than half an hour to reform him.

"Starr was given a chance to get out of that fight. But he loves the smell of smoke and gun-oil."



"Since the aunts were busy right then, serving the guests hot possets, and since the bride had to stay out of sight anyway, she found it easy to slip out to the horse corral and saddle up. She'd put on a shawl, of course, for the sunset air had turned cold, the same as that sunset out there right now. It reminded her that the wounded Starr had had a touch of fever when he left. 'That's why he had that horrid thirst!' So she took the same coat she'd put over him after doctoring him—her dad's old dragoon coat."

"I'll tell him it's the drinking and his evil ways that made him all this trouble today. They've been reforming me for four years, and it's my turn to reform somebody else. Thinks a card deck is a mother's Bible, same as all gamblers! I'll tell him he's got to settle down in a real business, freighting to the mines maybe, like Abner Brackett. Maybe Brackett will give him honest work."

"But wait a minute!" Janet said. "Did Gammy Susanna say he was handsome? I thought he was doddering and old."

"Old! Why I've been telling you all along that every time she did anything for him, washed the gray from his face, or gave him a hot drink, or let him sleep, he looked younger. He looked old at first because he'd been traveling on whiskey, taken half a jug of it, and he'd lost a lot of blood and ridden miles. As Gammy Susanna

said, liquor makes a man feel young and look old. Anyway, he had a poker face which didn't tell his age any more than the aces he held."

"Now we're getting somewhere!" Janet said enthusiastically.

"She found she'd ridden a long way before she caught up with the black sheep she was saving. He was slumped in his saddle, letting his horse limp as slowly as it wanted, toward its home corral in town. 'That's what he wants—town! And those dance-hall girls—anything that's joy and sin! I'll tell him to chase sin out of his life the way he chased Pico's bunch!' She laughed to herself. 'He sure chased Pico hell-a-lickety!' Then she hallooed to him. 'Mr. Starr! Mr. Starr! I'm a-coming!'

"But when she rode up, stirrup to stirrup, she didn't say a word of what she'd planned. She just said: 'I brought you this so you won't catch cold. My dad's coat.'

"When she threw the coat over his shoulders, he leaned in the saddle so that the coat was over them both. She was panic-stricken all of a sudden. 'Am I reforming him, or is he reforming me?' In the moonlight she saw he was younger than Abner Brackett. He wasn't yet thirty, as it turned out. She couldn't believe her eyes. She stared hard. And right then she heard—maybe she only felt the thrumming in her bones—the fandangos of the Pueblo far off.

"There was a way of life down there which Gammy Susanna had known as a child and been weaned from unnaturally. A way of life, as Angeléños used to say: 'A small mass in the morning, a game of cards at night!'"

"They're still under the coat," Janet reminded him.

Like most girls, when their elders talk of departed kin, Janet had never listened very carefully before. And like most girls, she was not quite sure of the married name of her father's maternal grandmother. The girl in the portrait was called only Gammy Susanna. Sometimes, come to think of it, she was Susanna Farraday—her maiden name. And when her marriage was mentioned, there was the name Brackett, and also Starr. "I've got it straight now," Janet said, looking at the lady of the jewels: "Susanna Starr."

And all this had happened as her father said in the first place—just before Gammy Susanna's wedding. "But the wedding did not take place at the rancho. Those guests waited a long time—Brackett's friends, skippers, supercargoes, cowmen—fuming and pacing. 'Waiting since sundown,' they growled, 'and not a drop of liquor on this whole damned outfit!'"

"That's a good ending, Dad. It's a honey. Especially the moral. 'Marry a gambler and be happy.'"

"He doesn't have to be a gambler. Just don't expect him to be perfect like Abner Brackett—that's more what I was driving at. Now, Tom Blake, for instance." He lowered his voice. "He's like Bill Starr. He's in a bad light with all of us, just as Bill Starr looked like a bandit and killer. How do we know Tom isn't postponing enlisting so he can spend these last few months with his mother? She's only got a few months left; the Doctor let that slip when he asked me if I could find somebody to manage Tom's grove. Tom's trying to keep the truth from her; that's why he hasn't told a soul, not even you. He gives up his chance at a commission and waits to be shoved in as a private—"

JANET looked out on the veranda where Tom was waiting. He was hatless and in shirt-sleeves, for it had been hot at sunset when he left his orchard. But the air had changed as suddenly as it did that sunset for Susanna and Bill Starr.

Janet got a coat her father wore on frosty nights when he checked the temperature in his orange trees. She went out and said: "Here, Tom. You'll be catching cold."

"Who, me?" he said, delighted.

"Put this on now. Don't be a drip, Tom."

She put her father's coat over his shoulders.

When better cockeyed stories
are produced, they will be
written, we believe, by—

Nelson Bond



I GUESS I might as well warn you to begin with, you won't find any record of this in the Army *communiqués*. It's as true as a Norden range-finder, but the brass hats aren't going to admit it; not by a bombsight! Because it's—well, it's a military secret, sort of.

Matter of fact, the only way I can tell it to you is to call the guy it happened to "Pvt. John Smith," which wasn't his name. The censors can't squawk about that. . . .

This Smitty was one of those lugs who trickled into the Army of the United States in the week after Pearl Harbor, when the nation was so stunned and shaken that anything could, and usually did, happen. He was a little bit of a squirt with an oversized proboscis and legs like Gandhi canes. He had a high, squeaky voice, a cockatoo-crest of sand-colored hair, and a complexion like mildewed noodles. A custom-built 4-F if there ever was one.

The only thing he had plenty of was patriotism. He was 180-proof American, and every time he even *thought* of the chief germ in Germany—Nazidom's rug-gnawing Fuehrer—his lone red corpuscle began to churn violently through his veins.

Of course, according to the old saw, one good churn deserves another. But Smitty's senior officers couldn't read the writhing in his anguished soul.

Eying his physique, they tsk-tsked his frenzied efforts to earn even the single stripe of a Pfc.—and did their best to pass the buck private to an unsuspecting outfit of another insignia.

As a result, Smitty served consecutive K. P. hitches in the Infantry, Artillery, Cavalry, and Medical Corps. His view of Army life was, naturally enough, somewhat distorted by the mountains of unpeeled potatoes from behind which he surveyed the scene. But he clung to his dream through thick and thin dishwater—his wistful dream of some day swooping down on the startled enemy like an avenging hawk from the skies. Because, incredible as it may seem, the secret ambition of Pvt. John Smith was to be—a paratrooper!

That, of course, was an impossibility. The men who go down to the melee in 'chutes must be (a) hardy, (b) tough, and (c) resourceful. And Smitty displayed an astounding lack of all these alphabetical attributes.

But he did get overseas. One day while tidying the Colonel's quarters—Smitty was an orderly between meals—he turned on a small desk radio. The

Colonel, who was trying to write reports, turned and glared—then he frowned in puzzlement as he beheld the misery in Smitty's eyes.

"Well, soldier," he asked, "what's the matter?"

Smitty gulped and nodded at the little radio, over which a plaintive, torchy voice was moaning a popular ballad.

"Th-that song, sir," he said. "It makes me sort of feel bad. Him and me was in boot camp together. Now he's in Ireland, finding a rose, and everything—"

The C.O. looked baffled. "What's that? You and *who*?"

"The guy they wrote that song about," said Smitty. "John E. DuBois. Gee, I sure wish I could—"

The Colonel groaned, but softly. "Smith," he said, "are you happy in this outfit?"

"Well, sir," admitted Smitty, "to be frank—"

"Is there some other branch of the service in which you'd rather serve?"

Smitty's eyes sauced. "Gee, Colonel!" he choked. "You don't mean you'd let me—"

F. O. B. Baghdad



The Captain clawed frantically at the edges of the carpet. "Smith!" he bel-lowed. "Get me out of here, quick!"

first entering wedge into land under Hitler domination.

Casablanca—Rabat—Oran—Algiers—Bougie—Bone—these names took on a new significance as the Yanks surged east to join Montgomery's British Eighth Army in a tightening band of steel about foredoomed Tunisia. Il Duce scowled, wondering who would get the Italian boot first—the invaders or himself. Herr Shickelgruber, flinging himself to the floor in a super-special paroxysm of rage, gobbled a doormat, two curtains and a napkin.

But Smitty was beside himself with joy. At last he was seeing action! Of course it wasn't paratrooping, but it was some compensation for those long months of spud-manicuring. And for a brief giddy hour, he had even seen and heard the guns of vengeance flaming.

Now, standing in the stilled streets of Casablanca, Smitty stared raptly eastward, past the white-walled horizons of the conquered city, and breathed deep challenge, expanding his scrawny chest to its full inch-and-a-quarter capacity.

He turned to his Captain, busily checking the boxes and crates pouring from the holds of their transport.

"What now, Captain?" he demanded eagerly. "What do we do now? Where do we hit 'em next?"

The Captain glanced at him abstractedly. "Ten!" he said, and made another check-mark. Then he frowned. "Do?" he repeated. "What do we do next? Rugs."

"Er—rugs?" repeated Smitty dimly. "Rugs," repeated his senior firmly. "We find rugs. Good rugs. Large rugs. We lost the ship carrying our office

equipment. We've got to set up a General Staff Headquarters. Got to be neat, well-furnished, to impress the local bigwigs. So we need rugs. You," he said, "find 'em!"

And he returned to his checking. Smitty squiggled. He piped: "B-but, Captain—"

"Rugs!" roared the Captain suddenly. "Dammit, find us some rugs. Lots of 'em. Nice ones. Big ones. Rugs! Do you understand?"

"Y-yes, sir," said Smitty meekly.

So into the exotic bazaars of mysterious Casablanca ventured Pvt. John Smith, armed with nothing more deadly than a requisition form and a pocketful of United States gold.

Because almost a year of Army life had drilled into him the habits of obedience and unquestioning loyalty, he set about his task with dispatch and efficiency. His eyes, which hungered for sight of enemies to be attacked, studied the gay carpets offered for his appraisal; his hands, which longed to grapple with the hated foe, fingered textures and counted out coins into brown Moroccan palms.

HE bought rugs—nice rugs, large rugs. Rugs fine enough to grace the floors of that General Staff Headquarters which must impress all comers with the dignity and wealth of the benevolently invading American forces.

But if his conditioned reflexes pursued the path of righteousness, not so his inner emotions. Inwardly Pvt. John Smith was seething with rage and frustration. He had come to Africa to fight; now, while his comrades-in-arms followed the fleeing foe seaward across burning sands, he spent the afternoon shopping!

"Makes me sick!" he grumbled. "For a plugged penny, I'd quit the doggone Army! Go over the hill—"

"Effendi—" whined a plaintive voice at his side.

"Might as well be home," muttered Smitty. "Do more good working in a war factory. Wish I was home! Huh?"

He spun, briefly hopeful, as a brown hand clawed at his shoulder. Attacked! An American soldier attacked in the marts of Casablanca by an Axis sympathizer! For an instant a holy triumph suffused him. He whirled, shaking off the hand, and fell into

"Name it," said the C.O. "Is there, Smith?"

"Yes! Oh, yes!" whispered would-be-paratrooper John Smith. "I'd like to be in the— Yes! Oh, yes sir! If you don't mind transferring me—"

"Very well," said the Colonel. "I'll put through a transfer immediately, Smith."

"H-huh?" said Smitty.

"To the S.O.S. That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

SO Private John Smith went to North Africa with the S.O.S.—the Service of Supply.

When his ship, loaded to the gun-wales with food and clothing, ammunition and medical supplies, on a November morn made rendezvous south and east of Gibraltar with an oceanful of ships similarly equipmented and troop-laden, he had no idea he was on his way to invade Morocco.

Neither did the Axis warlords. As a consequence, a few days later a shocked world awakened to discover the United Nations had driven their

judo position 2-B to await his antagonist's assault.

"*Effendi*,"—and the Arab smiled ingratiatingly,—"*you are buying carpets—non?*"

Smitty's corpuscle stopped racing; he straightened, bleak despair engulfing him.

"I am buying carpets, yes," he acknowledged dully.

"You will see mine—*non?*"

"I will see yours," said Smitty irately. "And stop correcting me before I say anything. That it?"

He stared with distaste at the roll of soiled cloth draped like a disconsolate boa from the Arab's shoulder. Not large enough, he thought swiftly, and *certainly* not sanitary. It looked as if it had served twenty years' duty as a welcome mat at the gate of a camel corral.

Then he gasped in sudden surprise as the Arab, with a deft shrug, unrolled the rug before him. It had not looked large on the vendor's shoulder. Eight by ten, maybe. But it unrolled—and unrolled—and unrolled—and it seemed to widen as it unrolled. . . .

"H-hey!" squeaked Smitty. "How big is that carpet, anyway?"

"It is large enough!" asked the Arab. Then, seeing by the sag of Smitty's jaw that it was, he repeated the final word in a louder, curiously commanding voice. "*Enough!*" said the native. And the rug, with a final, convulsive flicker of fringe, lay spread before them.

Smitty stared at it. It was an old carpet. But it had its points. He was no connoisseur of Oriental tapestries,

but from his experiences of the past hours he recognized that there was a subtle difference between this and the other rugs he had purchased.

Despite its obvious age, the colors of this rug were fresh and warm and alive. The design was—well, odd. To the Occidental eye, all the Oriental weaves are intricately baffling, but to the deliberate formlessness of this design there seemed to be some purpose. It was as if the cross-shuttling of its warp and woof was interwoven with some secret cabalism—some esoteric meaning beyond the confines of stern logic.

There was another strangeness, too. This carpet was no mere floor-covering, softly static and quiescent. It had grace and lift and vigor; its rich, lush hues had the soaring beauty of flight through sunlit clouds.

SMITTY was tempted. But nonchalance, he had learned, was the key to driving a successful bargain with these Arabs. So he pursed his lips, eying the rug dubiously.

"Not bad," he said casually. "Not good, of course—but not bad. How much?"

The Arab smiled furtively, as if they shared some secret knowledge.

"You like it then, *effendi*?"

"I'll tell you better," said Smitty, "when I've read the price-tag. How much?"

The Arab eyed him shrewdly.

"The price is low, *effendi*. Ridiculously low. A mere hundred pieces of gold."

"A mere hun—" Smitty's slender nose trembled with indignation. "Ridiculous? I'll say it's ridiculous! Do you know how much that is in American money? *One thousand bucks!* Are you nuts?"

The vendor shrugged expressively.

"But for such a carpet, *effendi*, the price is nothing. Behold its lavish colors! Feel of its gorgeous texture! Stand upon it—" He urged Smitty forward onto the rug. "How smooth, how fine, how soft beneath the feet! Truly a covering for the throne-room of a sultan—"

Smitty groaned, wishing he were back in camp, wishing he were home in the States, wishing he were anywhere other than in this sun-scorched street, haggling with an Arab madman. Thousand bucks, indeed! Why, the most he'd paid for any of his previous purchases was ten gold-pieces—a hundred bucks. And he wasn't any too sure the Captain was going to like even *that* price when the swindle-sheet was checked.

Still—it *was* a magnificent rug. The others would do for routine trimmings around the General Staff Headquarters, but this was something super-duper. Even through the soles of his G.I. shoes, he was conscious of the rug's deep-napped softness, its soul-stirring luxury.

"Aw, nuts!" fretted Private John Smith, weary of an unwanted responsibility, haggard with the burden of shopping when he wanted to fight a war. "The whole business makes me

sick! You too!" he declared, glaring at the Arab.

The Arab smiled. "But *such* a rug!" he repeated insistently. "And only one hundred—"

"Aw, phooey on you and your rug!" snorted Smitty. "And phooey on Casa-



"*Effendi*,"—and the Arab smiled ingratiatingly,—"*you are buying carpets—non?*"

*"Phooey on Casa-
blanca," snorted
Smitty. "I wish I
was watching the
Yankees play—"
Swoo-o-o-o-oosh!*

blanca, and the Army. I wish I was home in New York, watching the Yankees play—"

Swoo-o-o-o-oosh!

"TUH!" bawled the man in blue, throwing his thumb at the first-base boxes.

"Oh, you blin' Tom!" screamed the man beside Smitty. "Get a spy-glass! Get a horse! Whaddya mean, strike?" He gnawed off a bite of hot dog and turned to Smitty, breathing defiance and mustard. "Somebuddy oughta report that umpire to Landis," he grumbled darkly. "He's been fixed, that's what! That there wasn't no strike!"

Smitty stared at the man, at the field, at the umpire and players, dazedly. There was no doubt about it. He was in the grandstand at Yankee Stadium. On the diamond, in visitors' gray, were the Philadelphia Athletics. Standing at the plate was—

"W-who's that?" he asked his neighbor. "Batting for us, I mean?"

"Him?" The fan stared at him accusingly. "Whazzamatter with you? Don't you know Bill Johnson when you see him?"

Smitty said meekly, "I—I haven't been to a game for a long time—"

"Oh, I see!" The speaker eyed Smitty's uniform approvingly. "In trainin', huh? Nice goin', bud. I'm too old myself, but I got me a job at the shipyard. Why, that there at the plate's Billy Johnson. Yanks' new third baseman. An okay kid. Them two strikes

don't mean a thing. Wait till he sees one he likes—"

On the mound, the pitcher reared back, then lunged forward. The rookie hot-sacker swung. The ball slashed into center-field; and men on the base-paths sprinted. The rooter pounded Smitty's arm feverishly.

"See? What did I tell ya? He's okay, aint he?"

Then, seeming to realize for the first time the unusualness of his friend's attire— "Say!" he said. "This is some-

thin' new, aint it? How come you're wearin' a tin hat?"

Smitty touched his helmet self-consciously. He was painfully aware that his questioner's voice was loud—that a host of other curious eyes were now upon him.

"Why—er—" he faltered.

"When did you come in, anyhow?" demanded the other. "We're in the middle of the aisle. I didn't notice you till all of a sudden there you was—"

"Well," said Smitty desperately, "it was this way. I—"

"An' what's that there lap-robe doin' wrapped around your feet? Cripes a mighty! On a hot day like this!"

It was embarrassing. Very embarrassing! There was no way to conceal

*Illustrated
by Herbert
Morton Stoops*



the carpet which, like a colorful cocoon, was cuddled cozily about his legs. People were staring. And even worse—an M.P., attracted by the commotion, was moving down the steps, his glare threatening, his truncheon even more so.

Smitty realized suddenly, and with a sort of hollow horror, that in another moment he was going to be asked to show his furlough permit. And that he did not have. Or even an explanation as to how and why he,

who should be in the combat zone, was now sitting here in the Yankee Stadium!

The M.P. stopped at his aisle, leveled an accusing stick at him. "You in there!" he grated. "What's your name and outfit? Lemme see your pass!"

"G-gosh!" moaned Smitty feebly. "This is no place for *me*! I wish I was back in Casablanca—"

Swoo-o-o-o-oosh!

"HUNDRED pieces of gold," finished the Arab, smirking greedily. "It is a rare bargain at that price."

Smitty gulped. He was standing in the marketplace of Casablanca, listening to the completion of a sentence the Arab had started five seconds and five thousand miles ago. A scrap of paper which, at the instant of his departure, had been languidly fluttering to earth still hovered in midair; a stinging insect which, at the moment he had breathed his impetuous desire, had settled on his nose, was now sinking an experimental shaft into his beak. Smitty slapped at the insect and stared at his companion.

"L-look!" he creaked out anxiously. "D-didn't I j-just disappear for a minute or two?"

"Disappear, *effendi*?" In the Arab's beady eyes there twinkled an unfathomable shadow.

"I mean—didn't I—go away somewhere?"

The Arab spread his arms.

"Who knows, *effendi*? The soul travels swiftly, and whither it wends is known only to Allah. Whose Name," he added piously, "be exalted!" Then: "But the rug, *effendi*? I, perhaps, did not tell you it is no commonplace rug—"

"You're telling *me*!" choked Smitty.

"Truly, *effendi*, it is an ancient rug of honorable and romantic heritage. Years ago it came from far Iraq. From the city of Baghdad. It is said, *effendi*, that once long ago it was the property of no less a personage than his Serenity, the Caliph of that capital."

"Caliph!" whispered Smitty. "The Caliph of Baghdad!" Despite the heat, a cold horripilation crept up his spine. At last he was beginning to understand. The fabulous Caliph of Baghdad, the hero of a hundred fantastic adventures in a book Smitty had read as a child. "The Thousand and One Nights"—the Arabian Nights! The book had told of a carpet—an aged and beautiful carpet with the power of flight. The Magic Carpet!

"Well, *effendi*?" pressed the Arab.

"Gosh!" groaned Smitty. "I don't know. I ought to buy it, I guess. But—a hundred pieces of gold! That's a lot of money. I ought to ask somebody with authority: the Captain. I wish I was with the Captain right now—"

Swoo-o-o-o-oosh!



"DOWN by the old mill struth-heam," bawled the Captain, "where I first met yuh-oo. . . . Hey! Ouch!"

He dropped his soap and glared at Smitty, who, bleating frantic apologies, was struggling to climb off his lap. That was rather difficult, because the bathtub was narrow and slippery.

Smitty made it finally, though, and sprang to somewhat drippy attention. "I—I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered. "But I had to see you immediately. I had no idea—"

"That," fumed the Captain, "I can believe. You've had no ideas since you joined this outfit. Who gave you permission to come in here. And"—the Captain frowned—"how did you get in here, anyhow? That door was locked—"

"It—er—it was *that*, sir," explained Smitty. He dipped into the sudsy water, retrieved the sopping carpet and spread it on the floor. "I brought this rug to show you, sir, I—I mean, the rug brought me—"

The Captain's eyebrows gathered in a V—it was a V for violence.

"Private Smith," he thundered, "you've been drinking!"

"N-no, sir! Cross my heart and hope to—" Smitty stopped abruptly, glancing down to make certain he was not on the carpet. "Hope to die, sir. It really did. You see, it's a magic carpet, sir. The Flying Carpet."

"Wha-a-at!" The officer reddened—then paled. His eyes darted anxiously about the room. He clambered out of the tub. He said soothingly, "Now—er—see here, Smith: I know it's hot outside. You've had a touch of the sun. Wait right here, and I'll call a medico—"

"But it is, sir!" wailed Smitty. "It did carry me here. Look, sir!" He clutched the Captain's arm eagerly, drawing him onto the carpet. Then stepping on it himself, he said, "Take us back to the Arab—"

Swoo-o-o-o-oosh!

"YES, *effendi*?" asked the Arab. He didn't turn a hair at seeing a newcomer suddenly before him. Not even in so raw a state. The Arabs are a polite people. But others saw, and others turned and pointed and yelled. Veiled women covered their eyes, with spread fingers, and the chatter of the marketplace coalesced into one concerted gasp.

The Captain howled. The Captain howled and turned brick-red from head to toe with a color that was not sunburn. He clawed frantically at the edges of the carpet, struggling to shield the dignity of the United States Government with a veil of gaudy fringe.

"Smith!" he bellowed. "Get me out of here, *quick*!"

"Be right back!" promised Smitty—and hastily wished. The flying carpet swoo-o-ooshed and they were standing again in the Captain's quarters. "Well, Captain?" said Smitty.

The Captain was embarrassed. The Captain was angry and outraged and humiliated—but he was also logical. For a long moment he stared at Smitty thoughtfully. Then:

"Suppose you tell me all about it, Smith," he said. . . .

"So that's the whole story," ended Smitty. "Of course I can't *prove* it, sir. Unless you can check with that M. P. in New York. He seen me—"

"There's another point," said the Captain, "easier to check. You said Johnson hit a double in the fifth?"

"With two men on," nodded Smitty. "Yes sir. And by the way, sir—that's all the proof I need. I didn't even know the Yanks had a third-baseman named Johnson—"

"We can check that immediately," said the Captain. Then he stopped. "No! Wait a minute! What time is it?"

"Four-thirty, sir."

"Well, then, blast it!" roared the Captain, "that game you said you 'saw' hasn't even started in New York yet! It's only eleven-thirty A.M. in Manhattan!"

"I can't help that, sir," insisted Smitty doggedly. "I seen that game. Come to think of it," he added thoughtfully, "there's something funny about the whole time set-up with that carpet. You go some place and stay somewhere for a long time—and when you get back where you started from, no time has passed at all."

"You mean," demanded the officer, "that Arab hasn't even noticed we're gone?"

"He didn't notice the other times I went away."

The Captain reached for his clothes suddenly.

"Smith," he said, "we're going back, as soon as I'm dressed, and test that statement! And if you're right—"

"Yes sir?"

"If you're right—we're going to *buy* this carpet! Because I've got an idea. An idea that will win the war for the United Nations!"

Thus it was that a few hours later, as the twilight gathered in the dun Moroccan valleys, a captain and a private of the Service of Supply stood before the assembled generals of the invading forces. Spread before the group was an aged but still vibrantly beautiful carpet.

One general—the most important of all—passed a lean, capable palm over his nearly-bald head. He said: "You realize, of course, Captain, that this is almost unbelievably fantastic? The world would never understand—"

"The world doesn't have to know about it, sir. It's a military secret, anyway. And the plan is certainly worth a gamble."

"Briefly, your plan is—"

"For Private Smith and myself to fly on the carpet to Berchtesgaden—capture Hitler—and bring him back alive! It's as simple as that, sir."

The General bit his lip, frowning. "If you can do it," he conceded, "—mind, I say *if!*—if you can do it, it will do a lot to end the war. There is no doubt about that."

"No sir."

"But Captain, I think you understand that the Army can take no official cognizance of this—er—adventure. In the event of its failure, we cannot risk becoming a laughingstock before the world."

"We understand, sir," said Private John Smith. "We will take full responsibility, General." He sighed happily. "Golly! This beats being a paratrooper, even!"

"Very well, then," said the General. "You have our unofficial permission to make the attempt. You are armed?"

"To the teeth, sir," nodded the Captain.

"You won't kill him, of course."

"No sir. That would defeat our purpose. He's much more valuable as a hostage."

"Quite. And I understand you are to keep in touch with us by radio?"

"Yes sir." The Captain touched the portable transmitter on his back. "But this is really quite unnecessary, sir. You see, since the Magic Carpet bridges the time dimension in some obscure fashion, we will be back here with Hitler before you are conscious that we have gone."

"Hmmm!" said the General. "Per-raps. Well, good luck, gentlemen!"

He shook hands with each of them. "We'll be waiting for you."

"Yes sir," said the Captain, and glanced at Smitty. "All right, Smith," he said. "It's your rug. Take it away!"

They stepped aboard. Smitty closed his eyes, feeling the surge of soaring power flood through his soles, savoring the triumph of this long-dreamed-of moment. And then:

"I wish," he whispered, "we were in Berchtesgaden!"

Swooo-o-o-o-oosh!

"**T**HEY—they're *gone!*" gasped one of the officers.

"They'll be right back," croaked another. "I hope!"

"They said no time would elapse," said the most important general, anxiously. "I hope nothing's wrong."

An aide spoke up worriedly. He said: "General—I just thought of something. It may not be important, but—"

"Well?"

"That time-gap they were talking about. It's nine o'clock here. But do you realize—it's *ten* o'clock in Germany now? It was nine o'clock in Berchtesgaden *an hour ago!*"

The General stiffened. He said starkly: "By gad, you're right! Then they either wished themselves into a time that no longer exists, or—"

"Or," finished the aide miserably, "they got there an hour before they left here! Yes sir."

The General spun. "Quick!" he called. "Contact our radio division. See if the listening post picked up any messages out of Germany *an hour ago*. Any messages that might have come from them—"

WELL, as I warned you at the start, you won't find any record of this in Army *communiqués*. The

Army can't afford to let this story out, because it's a military secret—sort of.

And anyhow, the story can't be proved. The only two men who claim to have ridden the Flying Carpet are gone. And the Arab has disappeared into the furtive anonymity of the Casablanca native quarters.

So maybe it was all a pipe-dream. Maybe Smitty *did* get a touch of the sun and imagine the whole thing—and maybe his captain was shell-shocked, or something. As for their "disappearing" before the eyes of the Staff—well, twilight plays strange tricks in desert lands. Maybe the two of them went over the hill, and in some native drinking-place are at this very moment having a big laugh over the joke that they pulled on the Army brass-hats. . . .

But if that's the answer, then how come the baseball returns for that afternoon tell how in the fifth inning Billy Johnson of the Yanks poled out a two-run double? And why did an M. P. in New York City report seeing a steel-helmeted private in the grandstands at the Stadium?

And how, above all, can you explain the fact that when they checked on the German radio messages for the hour preceding that which saw the Flying Carpet's take-off, there were three in English that didn't make a bit of sense? Not a *bit* of sense, unless—

There were three messages, closely spaced. The signal was weak and the sentences garbled. But here's what the radio operator *thought* he heard:

At 9:00 p. m.—

"HAVE LANDED. HITLER STARTLED."

At 9:03 p. m.—

"HAVING A LITTLE TROUBLE. HITLER HYSTERICAL."

And at 9:07 p. m.—

"TRAPPED! SEND REINFORCEMENTS! CARPET GONE!" Then—very weakly: "HE ATE IT!"





A COLORED MAN played boogie woogie at a tiny white piano. Annabelle dozed, her chin on her hand, while Jonathan drank with the fat man. "The boogie walkit uppit, and the boogie thumpit down," the fat man said to the beat of the piano. "Walkit walkit uppit, and thumpit thumpit down; walkit thumpit, walkit thumpit, walkit thumpit down. . . . Rather good, isn't it?"

"Solid," Jonathan said.

The fat man chuckled.

"Interesting, about music and words." The fat man went on chuckling while he talked, as if he found the idle thought amusing. "They're both

the same thing, of course: forms of expression directed to the ear. While all the other multitudinous articulation of the universe goes to the eye."

"A skunk?" Jonathan suggested, swirling ice in his glass.

"Yes. Or rain in the face." The fat man laughed heartily, and Anna-

belle opened her eyes again. The fat man drummed on the table with his thumbs. "Walkit thumpit, tip a bucket, kick a puppet down, walkit uppit thumpit—" His thumbs drummed the rhythm with a curious, expert beat. . . . *didit dadida didit didadidit didadidit dit dadidit. . . .*

Boogie Beat



A blithe detective story by the author of "Obbligato"
by William Brandon

"Walkit uppit, thumpit bumpit, dumpit on the—" *didididit didit dada didit dadida didit didadidit*. . . . He said: "Here he comes now."

Jonathan looked over his shoulder at the door. A limping man was picking his way through the crowded café toward their table.

The fat man pushed back his chair and got ponderously to his feet. "Louie," he said. "Well, well, Louie!"

The limping man had a youngish face and strange eyes: light-colored eyes that were old and angry, resentful and suspicious. He disregarded the fat man's wreathing geniality.

"Siddown," he said. "Don't stand there and get the whole joint rubbering at us."

"Goodness!" Annabelle said. She was wide awake.

The fat man sat down, and the limping man spun over an empty chair from an adjacent table. He looked coldly at Annabelle.

"Louie," the fat man said, "this is Professor Jaffrey and Miss Annabelle Sims. They're here to talk to you."

"I know what they're here for," Louie said. Louie appeared to be drunk. "They didn't bring any cops with 'em? Okay, let's talk."

Annabelle said in awe: "Oh—why, I know who you are. I do, I'm sure I do. Are you?"

"Please, please," the fat man said hastily, jolted out of his massive composure, "that is all past. Louie doesn't like to be reminded."

"So I am," Louie said. "So what?"

"Please!" the fat man said.

DISREGARDING this plea, Annabelle turned to Jonathan. She was excited. Her eyes danced. She said: "He's Louis Tree. Don't you remember?"

She added with impatience: "Didn't you ever go to the movies ten years ago? I used to cry myself to sleep over Louis Tree when I was twelve." She smiled at Louie with a curious shyness. "I really did."

"Gee, thanks," Louie said, his young face sardonic, his old eyes bitter.

"I thought you were wonderful. You were in all those gangster pictures back then. You were always the boy who had never had a chance, and you didn't mean to be bad but no one ever understood you, and you were so tough because you'd always had to fight for whatever you got. And just as you were finding some gentleness and kindness and understanding from the beautiful debutante you had fallen in love with but could never hope to win—only she was really in love with you too and you didn't know it—why then you were always killed at the end of the picture, and my heart was simply broken to pieces. I saw you in everything you were in until—until—oh!" Her expression changed, and she was confused. She said unhappily: "I'm sorry, honestly. I'd forgotten."

Jonathan touched Annabelle's elbow. "Blow," he said.

"But I didn't mean—"

"Mind!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks! Please excuse me. I'll go powder my nose."

She left the table. Louie was angry. He said to the fat man: "Clowning, clowning? What the hell goes here?"

"Now, Louie!" The fat man was more and more distressed. "It is

strictly clean, Louie. You asked me to get someone, you know. She meant no harm, Louie, none at all. Miss Sims is only Dr. Jaffrey's secretary. Dr. Jaffrey is an eminent man. Dr. Jaffrey teaches English Literature at Jordan University, and he makes a hobby of criminology. He is just the man for you, Louie. You will thank me for persuading him to come. He wrote a book called 'Murder and the Mind.' Judges and wardens read it. At present he is connected with the War Department. Don't deceive yourself, Louie. You couldn't do better."

"Whoinell wants the War Department? I told you what I wanted!"

"Dr. Jaffrey is on leave, Louie. He is unofficial. This is personal with him, on his own time, because he is interested."

"Well, he's a bright young man," Louie said. "You can see that. You are a bright young man, aren't you, Jaffrey?"

He studied Jonathan from old eyes red around the edges. He swallowed in a dry throat, and picked up the fat man's drink and killed it.

He said: "I'll tell you what I want, Jaffrey. I want a fly-cop. I want a guy to talk to the cops for me. I want a smart guy, to clear me with the cops. If I don't clear myself before they get me, they're gonna railroad me. They're after me for a bum rap—it's a frame. They'll ride me back in, I know." His face was oily with sweat. He alternately drew deep breaths and wet his lips with his tongue. "Understand me, I know."

"They want you for murder," Jonathan said.

Sweat beaded Louie's forehead. His nervousness had increased until he seemed to be trembling deep in his bones. He breathed heavily, gaping for oxygen to supply the glandular activity of his fear.

The fat man watched him, his head swaying to the insistent boogie woogie. His thumbs drummed the table—*didit didida didit didadidit*. . .

"Yeah," Louie breathed. "Sure. I'm hot as a pistol. They want me because my name's still good in the papers. It looks big; it makes them look big."

"They pin this thing on me because I knew the guy. That's all—I knew the guy, ten years ago. Now somebody knocks him off, and they come for me."

"It's been in the papers," Jonathan said. "You mean the Hollywood producer? His name was Kavenell?"

LOUIE nodded. He drew a long uneven breath and shifted his position in his chair. He watched Jonathan suspiciously.

Jonathan said: "He was here in New York last week on business. He

was found murdered in a cheap furnished room on Third Avenue. There'd been a fight, and his neck was broken.

"The police couldn't learn who it was he'd gone to meet in that room, but they found quite a bit of money on Kavenell, and they think it might have been a blackmailer. They think Kavenell argued about paying off, and started a fight, and the blackmailer killed him. The cops questioned you the day after the murder."

"Simply because I knew the guy," Louie said. "That's all. I knew the guy once, ten years ago. So I'm their pigeon. I just knew the guy once, that's all."

"They questioned you, and then they released you. Yesterday they sent out a call to pick you up again."

"They tailed me. They don't leave me alone. They cased my room. I got word in a certain way from a friend of mine that they found some threads off Kavenell's suit stuck on a shirt-button. If they did, they planted 'em there. So now they send the alarm to bring me in again."

"It's only a question of time until they pick you up again," Jonathan said. "You're supposed to have some information on that murder that will help you; that's why I'm here. If you've got any such information, I'll try to use it to clear you. I've agreed to play ball with you and keep away from the police until I've investigated your information. To get to the point—what have you got?"

Louie hesitated, uncertain and afraid, his frightened angry eyes trying to pierce Jonathan's mind.

The fat man seemed to doze in his vast calm. His thumbs drummed gently on the table.

"Look," Louie said at last. "In the first place, I wasn't blackmailing Kavenell. That I swear to you. I don't know who was. I hadn't seen the guy for ten years. But this I'll admit. I knew plenty on him."

"The guy used to have his hand in a dope ring on the Coast. It was quick income for him when he needed it, and in those days he needed it."

"Not many people knew about that. I knew it."

"Somebody else knew it and was trying to collect on it. So Kavenell kicked. . . ."

"Sure. That slob is not the one to take such a thing lying down. . . . I know 'im—knew 'im."

Louie wet his lips. His old, angry eyes were blazing looking into the past.

His voice dropped: "I'll tell you: Whoever knocked him off has got Kavenell's mark on him."

"Kavenell had a trick ring. Seen it a hundred times. There were three little needles folded down on this

ring, and when Kavenell closed his fist, it made these little pins open out.

"When he hit a guy with that hand, it left three little marks. An antique, see, a poison ring!"

"The ring was made so the three points could have poison on 'em, and all you'd have to do would be clip a guy to kill him."

"Kavenell's had that ring on his hand for twenty years. He's—he was superstitious about it; he thought it was a lucky ring, wore it all the time."

"But it was gone when they found him dead. I heard that a certain way; I've got certain connections. His ring's gone, but there's still the white mark on his finger where he wears it."

"He fought before he was killed—is that what they say? If he did, he hit the guy, some place. Kavenell was very handy."

"All right. Those points on that ring would stick you through a suit of clothes. If Kavenell hung one on the guy—and he damn' well did if he had a chance—then the guy's marked, wherever he was hit!"

"That's why the guy took the ring, after he knocked Kavenell off."

"The cops don't know about the points on that ring. All they know is, they can see a place where Kavenell's been wearing a ring, and the ring's gone."

"And you won't find any marks on me, chum. That I can prove."

ANNABELLE returned to the table after Louie and the fat man had left.

She said: "I did it. I had all the equipment in the powder-room. I had to give the maid a tremendous bribe."

"Did you get a clear recording?"

"I think so. Jonathan, you're not intending to turn it—him—over to the police, after—"

"Hell, no," he said explosively. "I'm not interested in the police. I'm interested in Louie. I want the recording to study. He's unique. An actor, typed in criminal rôles, growing into a *bona fide* criminal personality. What was he sent up for, ten years ago? I've forgotten."

"I think it was manslaughter. He was drunk and driving, and he ran over someone. I would go and bring it up to him. And you might at least have told me beforehand who he was. Isn't there any pity in your system? Can't you see the tragedy in him?"

Jonathan called for the check. "I can see that he's schizophrenic, or a reasonable facsimile thereof. Unusual case. A motif in a minor key is dominant. Violent, in fact. Very interesting." They got up to leave. "He'll be a footnote to my chapter on Parembolic Crime. . . . You'd better put all that down."



"Walkit thumpit, tip a bucket," said Jonathan. "Something like that—" With waddling haste, the fat man began to run.

Annabelle got out her notebook and pencil and scribbled pothooks while they filed between the tables toward the door.

She said: "Of course, you're only interested in your guinea pig—you're not interested in the murder at all; but if you were, I should think you might be wondering about that fat man. He seems to know Louie, and if Louie knew enough on that man who was killed to have been able to blackmail him, then maybe the fat man knew enough too. Who the dickens is he, anyway? He knew you and he knew me, but no one introduced anybody; you just sat down and started talking to him, and—"

"You're improving, pigeon." Jonathan looked pleased with her. "We'll look for three scratches on the fat man tomorrow. I don't know who he is. I don't think he's got a name. He's called Fat Man. All I've ever heard. He was Louie's cellmate in stir, for ten years or so. They got out about the same time last year."

"In prison, the fat man? What on earth for?"

"Why, there used to be a racing racket; it was fairly popular; involved a telegrapher on a private wire sitting in the stands at the track, and sending race results direct to crooked players spotted around in various pool-rooms. The players would have time to get their bundles down on the winning

horse before the official results came in. The fat man can operate a key, and he was the character who ran the wire. He used to be a marine wireless operator, some place in his career. Or so he says."

"You do know interesting people. Are you studying him too?"

He grinned down at her. They were in the street, waiting for a cab. The blue electric sign of the café blinked on and off above their heads. "He doesn't rate it. Garden variety. That polysyllabic language of his is—While you've got your book out," he said abruptly, "put down 'The music walkit uppit, and the music thumpit down.' No, 'boogie' for 'music.' No, never mind. Forget it. Here's your cab."

"My cab? Aren't you coming?"

"I'll call you tomorrow."

SHE hesitated. "You look funny. I'm worried when you look like that. What are you going to do?"

"Listen to that record. I might find Kavenell's ring in it."

"But I thought you weren't going to pick up the equipment until tomorrow. I told—"

He said: "Beat it." He closed the taxi door. She protested. He gave the driver a bill and Annabelle's address. He waved at her as the cab pulled out. He got a glimpse of her looking back at him anxiously. Her

hair was blowing, and her eyes were large. He enjoyed these moments, when she appeared unable to conceal a fretful interest in him. It was, he knew, an empty mannerism, an attitude, a trick instinctively employed by females the world over. It was similarly instinctive for the male to be flattered by it, even while he analyzed it, coolly, with the laboratory abstraction of the trained technician.

It was very good, analyzing Annabelle: Something like boogie woogie. *Thumpit thumpit . . . rapid pulse, rapid beat . . . not very cool, at that. . . . The boogie thumpit thumpit,* analyzing Annabelle.

The café doorman appeared at his side and said, "Taxi?" and Jonathan realized he was still standing on the curb, grinning vacuously at the empty spot in the dark street where Annabelle's cab had been some time before.

He came to himself, unreasonably irritated, for a number of vague reasons, at the interruption.

"Me fella go walkabout," he said. He peered closely at the doorman. "Excuse me. I thought you were a Tonkinese. You like gammon along what name? Fassim talk belong you, me cross too much along you. You long-long along drink."

The doorman's startled face was satisfactory. Jonathan filed it for future



Illustrated by
Manning Lee

*"Police found
the mark of
Kavenell's ring
—three small
scratches."*

reference in a chapter he was contemplating on the paralysis of the unexpected. He walked away, feeling better, and thinking of pidgin English and boogie woogie, Annabelle and communications and music. Forms of expression directed to the ear, the fat man had said. . . .

The fat man was at the same table on the following evening, when Jonathan and Annabelle entered the café. The colored man had not yet appeared at the little white piano. Although early, the place was fairly crowded.

The fat man saw them approaching. His eyes widened with polite greeting, and he began pushing and struggling to get to his feet.

"My dear friends!" he said. He offered his hand. He contrived an elephantine bow. Annabelle let him take her hand. His touch was warm and friendly.

"I am very sorry," he said. "I have bad news. The police pulled Louie in this afternoon."

"That was to be expected," Jonathan said, "sooner or later."

The fat man sighed. He clasped and unclasped his thick fingers. "I am afraid Louie thinks you turned him in, but that's of small moment. What matters is—ah—I really am very sorry, Dr. Jaffrey. I assure you I acted for Louie in good faith."

"You're sorry about what?"

"The police found the mark of Kavenell's ring on Louie's chest—three small scratches, where the pins on the ring had jabbed him. There was a similar mark on his arm."

"That doesn't make much sense," Jonathan said after a moment. "Why would he have told me about those marks, if he had them on him at the time?"

The fat man shrugged. "Bravado, possibly. He was drunk. Louie has a very strange mind. Of course, there is the possibility that the police themselves planted the marks on him—assuming they had somehow learned about the needles on the ring. Doubtless that will be Louie's story." He smiled. "That," he said, "usually is Louie's story."

Jonathan was silent. His fingers tapped the table absently.

"I am very sorry," the fat man said. "I acted for Louie in good faith, when I contacted you."

Jonathan didn't reply. His fingers drummed rhythmically in the silence. Annabelle became aware of something that was contrived about his attitude of study.

"Naturally," Jonathan said at last, "Louie was followed after he left here last night."

The fat man was startled. "The police were on him then, you mean?"

"No, no! I had him watched. I have to protect my position in these cases." His fingers drummed the table. The fat man glanced at them, as though he found the nervous tapping an annoyance.

"He had a few more drinks," Jonathan went on, "and he passed out. Someone could have taken a pin and jabbed those marks on him then, but you were with him. You'd have seen anyone trying to stick pins in him. You were sober."

The colored musician appeared, pushing the little white piano before him. A few customers clapped. Someone called out a request. The piano-player grinned widely, waved.

"But it all returns to the ring," Jonathan said. "The ring."

Annabelle was struck by a growing intensity in the fat man's manner.

His eyes had fastened on Jonathan's tapping fingers. His eyes were round and wide.

"I talked to a friend of mine in Centre Street this morning about the ring," Jonathan said. "He told me that the police now have Kavenell's ring."

"When they noticed a ring was missing from his finger, they went on a hunt for it. They found it at a jeweler's."

"The day before Kavenell was killed, he left it there to be fixed. One of the points on it had become unjointed. It was still at the jeweler's when Kavenell was killed."

THE piano-player began his work. He swayed back and forth, grinning, while his hands walked rhythmically up and down the keys.

"So of course," Jonathan said, "Kavenell wasn't wearing the ring when he was killed, and naturally he couldn't have marked Louie or whoever killed him. The police have some idea the fact still might be valuable for use in trapping the murderer, in the belief that the murderer didn't notice the ring or the absence of the ring during the fight, and if told about it in the right way now, might believe the ring had been lost off Kavenell's finger during the fight, and consequently make some slip that might—"

His voice trailed away. His fingers drummed to the beat of the piano—*didit dadida didit dadadidit* . . .

"Walkit thumpit, tip a bucket," Jonathan said. "What were the words you made up last night for this music?"

The fat man's eyes were glued on Jonathan's tapping fingers. His face was like wax. Crooked lines of sweat crept down the waxen creases of his fat.

"They were very good," Jonathan said. "Interesting, what you will

think of to music! Walkit thumpit, tip a bucket—something like that—

The fat man heaved himself erect. The table crashed over on its side. With a comical, enormous, waddling haste, the fat man began to run. Another table was overturned in his wake. Startled customers dived out of his way.

"SO you had detectives planted all over the place," Annabelle said, "and they caught him at the door, and he confessed. He murdered that man Kavenell; and when the police began looking for a blackmailer, he was frightened, because he was a blackmailer, so he tried to make Louie look guilty in his place. So you simply made him confess—by tapping your fingers. Did you hypnotize him?"

This was another night. They were in the Blue Room. The place was packed. The publicity had helped it. "Well, there was the ring," Jonathan said.

"Yes, I can understand about the ring. When Louie told about it, the fat man thought Kavenell had lost it off his finger during the fight, and he was worried for fear the police would find it; and then when he made sure there were no scratches from the ring on himself, he saw how he could use it to save himself by faking marks of the ring on Louie. So he waited until Louie passed out, and then he took a pin and— You said you had Louie followed that night. You never had anyone followed in your life."

"Well, I followed him in my mind. I knew what had happened, because

it was the only thing that could have happened."

"So you simply took your psychology and frightened him into giving up."

He grinned. "It's been demonstrated, with rats, that they lose their minds when doors are unexpectedly closed in their faces."

"And you closed doors in the fat man's face?"

"Certain types of unimaginative minds find it necessary to think out loud. Unconscious request for the aid of physical expression. Better put that down."

She got out her book and pencil. "I do wish you'd stop tapping your fingers. It makes me nervous."

"The boogie walkit uppit, and the boogie thumpit down," Jonathan said.

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

THIS type of crossword puzzle employs clues of various types, mixed in with the definitions of the words. For example, anagrams: "Pieces of eight" defines *specie*, of

which word *pieces* is an anagram. Hidden words spell out the defined word as parts of other words: *Hide each plan* defines *idea*. The enigma type of definition plays on the

syllables in a word: "I put in ad for help" is *aid*, since "I" is put into "ad." Puns, backward spellings, and straight dictionary definitions are also used. (Solution on page 35.)

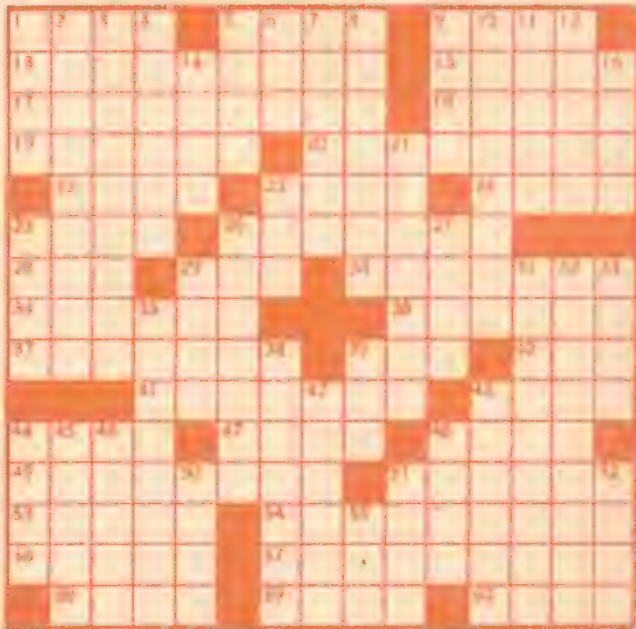
ACROSS

- 1 Willingly make a mess of your life?
- 5 Proceeds with it in suites
- 9 Gets round with a bicycle in little horsepower
- 13 Un'oly Axis moves uneasily
- 15 Leon goes out light comedy, returns a heavy
- 17 Hard water froths into cold treats
- 18 A student of farming gets GI in this age
- 19 The list is OK'd, etc.
- 20 Natsi Ali fixes Nazi Allies
- 22 The dupe gets the bird
- 23 Friend though in is out—sounds wearing
- 24 Pants-dwellers
- 25 Let Dante pay up and lose his capital
- 26 Noises seem otherwise in clams
- 28 Ten quit the Orient for Brazil
- 29 Depew had influence on the speedway
- 30 When you lisp (utter indistinctly) conceal it
- 34 Main room of Roman house
- 36 French medicinal tea, given by *une sainte*
- 37 More like a dictator (or like a cow)
- 39 A good egg's best friend is his mother
- 40 Nab the backslider from prohibition
- 41 Spread made of a wersted fabric
- 43 I steam out of Fiume
- 44 A "but" that deterred Hawaiians
- 47 In the morning he had a slight cough

- 48 "Along the cool sequestered — of life." Gray
- 49 Recurring illnesses disturb Pa's sleep
- 51 Take a drink after five? We're closing
- 53 I ne'er arranged to see a girl
- 54 Lost continent
- 56 Make pie, chop-chop! M, nice!
- 57 I reenlist, showing a tendency to return
- 58 Bombed dam
- 59 Bring back a small drink of Scotch, pard
- 60 Break the pledge at the border

DOWN

- 1 Set in the Irish chamber
- 2 Got in coin—issue unknown
- 3 Will managers arrange for ukores, etc.?
- 4 Flickering femininely, gives up the ring
- 5 Sue takes tea, gets fat
- 6 America finished Lampedusa
- 7 Ira lay under the elm (in New York)
- 8 Ty's mess of schemes to beat the horses
- 9 Make hale
- 10 Bacchanalians act as goats, sir
- 11 Groan, activated by wind
- 12 Nothing less than an option on this place
- 14 Lost city that Timoshenko released
- 16 Scattering largess, left minus a rag
- 21 Poet dad acquired a child
- 23 Flee the family without a friend



- 25 Bedouin scattered sand in saraband
- 26 Cream as make-up for photo-takers
- 27 My downfall, when I get the runaround
- 29 Lost the porch for courtship
- 31 Late ad, but somehow put in a column
- 32 Nine gleam with shiny paint
- 33 Ne'er-does-well to make a name
- 35 Release, in a way, is uncase
- 38 Tried again, hear, to be wrapped in red
- 39 Hesitate to surround
- 42 Steer W. to go in this direction
- 43 Fie on Ann — what a girl!
- 44 A neat fleecing
- 45 Eagle's nest
- 46 Bend around, like an L, and bring together
- 48 After six, Al takes to the bottle
- 50 Look noble
- 51 Flippant, even when giving last gasp
- 52 Princely Italian house
- 55 The backward boy is forward, too

What Do A Readers'

Is That to Be So, America?

THIS is a soldier's appeal. For whatever I may be giving to preserve this nation, for the years, for the loneliness, for the suffering, I have but one request: Forget me when it's all over; forget the bonuses, the jobs, the rehabilitation. All I ask is that you keep America alive, that you keep it in order, that you keep it just and humane.

Recent events have been far from reassuring. Our country and its cause stand besmirched today by the blood-stained fingers of the "ferocious non-combatants" of Detroit and Los Angeles. For the duration of their alcoholic fury, the significance of the dead and the triumphs of Attu and Sicily sank into sardonic meaninglessness. Once more they died in vain. Once more we won and then lost. Once more Hitler outsmarted us, and might have said to himself: "I may lose the war, but I will win in the end. I had to yield temporarily, for in the contest of fires, theirs was the greater flame; but the final day of triumph will be mine, for they will be consumed by the conflagration I started, and the victory they think they have achieved will become a shallow illusion."

Is that to be so, America?

Will the justified indignation engendered by Nazi and Japanese bestialities remain a permanent holocaust accomplishing in stages that which Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito tried and failed to achieve during the war—the division of our people and the consequent disintegration of our nation?

We must learn to canalize our emotions. Ours is not a war against races, peoples, individuals. We are fighting the intangible evils which produce wars. This war, in fact, is a war against wars—the wars that impede progress, the wars that destroy the works of peace, the wars that halt and often frustrate the search and the struggle for greater dignity in life.

Sgt. Joseph Klein.

Little People Make This Nation Great

BEFORE the holocaust that was Pearl Harbor, you were a respected small-town business man. You listened to the news-broadcasts and read the daily papers. The war was far away and unreal. Your life didn't change, nor lives around you.

There came a rude awakening.

It was in the early part of the day, and there were only a few customers

in the store when Mrs. Anderson, one of your regular customers, came in. She was always so pleasant that you stopped and spoke to her a few minutes. She was her usual pleasant self, so that you hardly noticed that little lines of worry had begun to form across her forehead. After she had gone, one of the clerks turned to you.

"Isn't Mrs. Anderson nice?" she said. "I don't see how she does it."

"You don't see how she does what?" you asked.

"She has four sons in the armed forces. Didn't you know?"

Four sons! Four sons, and not one questioning word had passed her lips as to why she should give so much and others so little.

A thought came to you. You would gather all the pictures of local boys in the service and display them in a show window, that people might know what this little Minnesota community was doing. There were only a few to begin with, but the numbers soon grew—grew beyond all expectations. Soon you had a little section over at one side of the window, bordered by flowers.

The courage of the little people; the people next door, the mailman who brings the mail to the door every day; the farmer who comes to town twice a week; the little old lady who works in the bookstore across the street—the little people who make this nation great. There is the gray-haired woman who comes to town every Saturday night to bring her eggs to market and buy the week's groceries. She comes up to you timidly; in her hand she carries a little flat package carefully wrapped in tissue paper. She unwraps it with tender care and holds it up for you to see. It's the picture of a boy, a sailor boy. You can see a little colored bar on his left breast with a tiny star on it. You know he served on the *Lexington*. She smiles up at you a little.

"You'll be real careful with it, won't you, Mister?" she asks you in a gentle voice. "You see, Tom was lost in action last week, and it's the only picture we have."

What can you say to people like that? You know, inside, that the Japs, the Germans, the Italians are fools to think that they, or any nation, can subjugate people like that.

After that it doesn't seem enough to be a passive citizen, just helping with the War Bond drives, buying some yourself, being an air-raid warden. You happen to know how to fly, so you offer your services, but they tell you you're too old for combat. But, they say, you can be an instructor. So you tell your little family good-by; you tell Barbara that she'll have to help Mother now; and you tell Dougie that he's the man of the house until Dad gets back.

Now you feel better. You're not out there, but you've helped train the boys who are. Yes, you feel better.

E. K.

Win This One for Keeps, Boys!

I WATCHED the boys go off to the last war, and hoped when they had finished it, that it would be the last one; but here we are up to our necks in another one.

Physically, I am unable to contribute a great deal to this one. I have watched the boys from this neighborhood answer the call of their country, and have come to realize more than ever that war is a cruel soulless thing. Everything else must sidetrack for it—everything, that is, that does not contribute directly or indirectly to its prosecution, while it roars ahead at full speed with an open right of way.

The local board for District 4 is just down at the corner. Every week or so two big buses line up to take the boys to the camp.

After the buses leave, familiar faces are missing. My neighbor's two boys across the street have left long since. Farther down the block others have gone also. One has gone from my home too; we loved him, and hated to see him go. But my neighbors loved their sons no less, and hated to see them go just as badly. I see young

MOST of us are interested to know how the other fellow looks upon or solves his personal dilemmas. And with this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the

You Think?

Forum

mothers on their way to the grocery with youngsters toddling along; some of these tots have never seen their dads, may never see them. I look at these little fellows and wonder if twenty-five years hence, they too, like their dads, will be going to foreign battlefields to stem the black tide of militarism under some new banner just as detestable as Nazism, or Fascism. Will they too be carried to the fever-laden jungles in the South Pacific, to hurl back the fanatical yellow hordes of Japan?

Has war become an epidemic that must break forth in each succeeding generation like some gigantic volcano, spewing its lava of death into the peaceful valleys of human society? If so, the prospects ahead for civilization are gloomy indeed. The investment by our boys of their very lives in the grim business of war is a tremendous investment—an investment that should be backed by a tremendous security.

That is the only consolation we can get out of this war, for the price the boys are paying, the consolation that Jimmy, Jr., unlike his dad, won't have to die a few years hence on some foreign battlefield.

They tell us there is a law of averages operating on this terrestrial globe: a law that sort of averages things up in the game of life. Then, isn't it about time peace had her innings? I mean universal peace; where no country, no matter how small, will feel the devastation of war and its terrible aftermath. Some say this is impossible; if it is, then the horrible specter that once again in a few short years we must toss our boys on the bloody altar of Mars is still with us.

Preachers tell us of a millennium, a thousand years of peace, a sort of golden age of prosperity in all the world. Cynics scoff at this, as a pipe-

dream; well, pipe-dream or not, I like to dream that it will one day be a reality.

Maybe this millennium is the law of averages giving old Mother Earth a break; goodness knows she deserves one.

In the meantime, when this war is won, I want to see that young fellow from the next block come back to the girl next door; she is still waiting. I want to see that big fellow from across the street come back to his motorcycle. It used to make more noise than a half-dozen of them ought to make, and the noise would set my nerves on edge. But I want to see him come back and tear down the street with the thing wide open.

I miss those boys; they used to pass down the street when the day's work was done, hurrying home to a hot supper prepared by a doting mother. They were clean-cut American lads, tolerant and thoughtful even of us old codgers. Win this one for keeps, boys, and hurry home.

I am waiting to hear those cheery greetings—"Hi, Mikel!" "Hello, Tom!" "Howsa boy, Bill!"

I hope they all come back; some probably won't; maybe mine won't. But if they don't, and Jimmy and John Jr. never have to go, the sacrifice will not have been in vain.

W. E. E.

Welder's Weakening

CONFESSIO*N*, they say, is good for the soul, so I'll just give my poor old soul a shot in the arm by confessing how prejudiced I have been, and telling of my cure.

I am a foreman in a welding shop, and proud of my skill. When my boss told me some lady welders were reporting for work, I said: "Well, Mac, I guess that lets me out. The kind of welding we do here is something no woman could learn."

But Mac talks me into staying, at least until I've given them a trial. So the next Monday (God help me), I'm turning over as pretty a mess of pipe to be welded as you ever saw, just grimly shutting my eyes and handing it out to a bunch of goggles-eyed, slacks-garbed females from eighteen to sixty. "Wait till the boss sees what they do to this," I'm thinking. "He'll

send them back to their cookstoves and washtubs."

It's almost whistle-time before I get around to checking their day's output. I keep dreading it, because I hate to see good material wasted, and I'm wondering if what my mamma taught me when I was a boy is going to stay with me enough to keep me from cussing when I see that ruined pipe.

But when I finally get up the nerve to inspect the women's welding, I'm so popeyed with amazement that you could have knocked my eyes off with a stick. Every one of those gals has done as fine a job of welding as I've ever seen.

Since then I have stopped getting more gray hairs every time the draft gets another man. My wife says my disposition is getting almost human again. I know now that where the men have to leave off, the gals will take over. Only trouble is, I'm afraid they'll get so darn' good, I'll have to give one of 'em my job!

Ebb Gunn

Sixty-Four Japanese

SOME statistics I saw today were as frightening as enlightening. This was simply a list of Axis war prisoners in America: sixty thousand Italians, fifty thousand Germans—and sixty-four Japanese. Yet our forces have been in contact with the Japanese for a year longer than they have faced the Italians and the Germans face to face.

The attitude of the entire Japanese race seems to have been summed up in the words of the last survivors on Attu: "Come and get us, you Americans —"

While the peak of German production has long ago been passed in material of war, the Japanese have just begun to make their great new empire pay off in terms of oil and rubber, tin and gold. And their industrial capacity is quite as unscathed as our own, because except for Doolittle's token raid, not one pound of bombs has fallen on the Japanese mainland—that is the fact that makes me uneasy.

I am a flying instructor, and I naturally have the perspective of an airman. When I read of thousands of tons of bombs falling on industrial centers like Hamburg, Cologne, Turin and Milan, I feel quite certain that the Beast of Berchtesgaden will soon throw in the towel, because it's pretty certain that the German race is not going in for self-destruction.

But what of Japan? That they intend to fight to the bitter end seems

future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

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inevitable from the way their troops have fought on every front, and the sooner our great bombers start the systematic destruction of the Japanese industrial system, the better I shall feel—because not until every great Japanese city is a smoking ruin will any white man on the face of the earth be safe from the threat of ignominious slavery or death.

R. C. F.

From North Africa

"WHAT do you think?" On the other hand, we who are over here in Africa are asking, "What are you back there in the U. S. thinking?" However, here is what a lot of us fellows who are overseas think of quite often. We all remember the United States as we last saw it. During the months since then we have traveled many miles expecting to hear the cry "Submarine!" or "Aircraft!" at any time of the day or night. We saw Belfast after the German air force had laid it low. Some of us saw London and other towns after the blitz. Many of us saw and talked with veterans of the Dieppe raid.

Thousands have given their lives for what they had been taught was right, as had their fathers and grandfathers before them. Always a war to end wars! But before, it was always the soldier that gave his life for the cause; now this most destructive of all wars is a total war. Civilians as well as soldiers and sailors have felt the iron heel. What is to become of this civilization of ours after the final round has been won? What restrictions are to be placed on the conquered? What is to be done to prevent a recurrence of the same thing in the future?

First must come rehabilitation of stricken countries and peoples. England must rebuild her homes, shops and factories. The common man must be made secure after the years of pounding and privation. France, Belgium, Holland, Greece, Poland and other countries which have been pounded and ground into the dust must again rise in all their glory. Italy and Germany are feeling the sword more and more each day. Will they not also have to be reconstructed along a different line than now? Russia will also have wounds to lick, and will again apply herself to the task of reconstruction of stricken areas. This, then, is the first task that must be accomplished: Reconstruction and rehabilitation of a war-torn earth.

The second question is who and how are the conquered to be governed and taken care of? A government along civilian lines must be set up. Military law must be temporary only. But who is to control this civil government? There is no doubt that

there must be a central government set up which will have representatives from all nations in the world. This Central Government must have power to control all aggressor nations—have power to declare war, impose embargoes, etc. It must be a club which can and will be used. To enforce decisions of the Central Government there must be an army, navy and air force. A gun without ammunition is worthless.

Representation in the Central Government would be based on percentages, according to population of nations represented. Hence, what more right that the army, navy and air force also be placed on the same percentage basis? Why should the large nations of the world not divide responsibility with their smaller cousins? That there must be armies, and not of the pre-war type, I think even the pacifist will acknowledge. A large navy or air force without the army is useless. Don't believe for one minute that I think our government, or England's, or any other country's should be dissolved. Never! The Central Government would control commerce between countries, the size of the army, navy and air force, etc. If a ratio is set up, it would be their specific duty to see that it was enforced rigidly. They should also control civil air lines, shipping and all other inter-country commerce, their army, navy and air force to be used as a world police force. They should be well paid, efficiently run and free from graft. A high standard should be set up for all applicants mentally, physically and morally. Each country in turn would maintain an army, etc., as set up by the Central Government for its own internal use and police.

In all the above you have probably noted no mention of Joe Smith, Tom Brown and yours truly upon our return to the U. S. and demobilization of the Army of the United States. Many of the lads, and some of us older fellows too, will desire to make the army their life's work. For them I say this: Give them a living wage. Don't cut the Army down to 150,000 men, and don't cut their base pay down to twenty-one dollars per month. What kind of a man would you expect to employ for those wages? Let's make the Army a source of pride; let's make it a good Army that is well paid, clothed and equipped. Would you expect to hire a policeman in your town for twenty-one dollars per month? The army, navy and air force are your national police force, and it is time that we show the world that not only do we have the best army in the world, but that it is the best paid, equipped and trained for any emergency at any time. A bum never attacks a trained fighter. Neither would

Germany have attacked France without full knowledge of her weakness. A good offense is always good defense.

Let's continue conscription in the Armed forces. Was there ever a man, a young man, who would not benefit by the proper disciplinary training? What better training could a man just finishing high school get at that time? Give him an opportunity to make up his mind whether he desires to continue his schooling in college, also to determine just what line he would be best fitted for if he does desire to continue. After completion of his military training, he would be furloughed to the Reserve Corps. Thus would be built up a vast reservoir of military might. Trained soldiers, not the raw recruit such as is now being brought in from civil life and handed a gun to take up a life to which he is unaccustomed and for which he is unfitted. One trained man is worth ten in recruit training.

What then of Joe or Tom or yours truly that decides to tackle civil life again upon being released from the military service? You will find some of us changed. Some have grown old for their years, and some are no longer the fine physical beings they were. Joe has lost an arm or leg, and Tom is still suffering from shock. Some of the sights they have seen will never be erased from their minds. What of them as well as the others sound in body and limb? They will want work, and plenty of hard work too, in order to forget their dreams and troubled minds. Has anyone come forward with a scheme whereby they may be made to forget their losses, or must they stand on a street-corner selling pencils? Are they to be a source of pity by their wives, children and parents the rest of their lives?

Then too there is Joe. The small plant he worked for has since gone to the wall. He doesn't want charity or "relief" work. Is he to get a job and be able to hold up his head, knowing that a thankful country showed its appreciation? What of the girls who have taken over their men's jobs in their absence? Are they to return to the home or become contestants for their very job, the breadwinner or the housewife? What of the back taxes that piled up while he was in service? Is he to lose the home he worked and saved for years to pay for?

THESE and many more thousands of questions are what we think of as we sit here, knowing that in the near future we must again face our common enemy, the German, or the Jap.

The big question is: "What do you think, America?" and "What will be done about it?"

Russell G. Musick.

COUNTERCLOCKWISE

by H. Bedford-Jones

A Signal Corps experiment in electronics brings about an amazing hark-back during the Sicilian campaign.

COSGRAVE straightened up wearily, his worn aquiline features haggard. Careless of his two and a half gold stripes, he wiped his sweating forehead with his cuff.

"I don't appreciate kidding, Watkins," he said in a tired, toneless voice. "Who the hell let you up here? Correspondents are barred from here."

"I'm not kidding. I just asked how your baby was coming along." Watkins sat on a desk-corner, running his eye over the tubes and dials and panels. "Your pal Lundgren passed me up to this deck; he's coming presently. He said the biggest hush-hush story of the war was up here, but it's not radar so I could sit in on it if you didn't mind. Says he's quit."

"We'd like to quit, but we can't," Cosgrave said bitterly. "I can't blame him if he does. It's a story of failure, of miscalculation, of faith unjustified and hopes blasted. The fleet's heading for Sicily and we're heading for failure. But I haven't quit, understand? Come hell or high water, I'm shoving ahead with it."

"You're worn out. Here's a canteen of hot coffee and a couple of chocolate bars," said the correspondent, unburdening himself. "Gimme the yarn. You can trust me. Speaking of hell and high water, we've got both in sight. The sea's picking up and soldiers are seasick all over the place. There's a high wind blowing and it's liable to knock out the whole invasion plan. With dawn you'll see plenty of hell, win or lose."

Wearily Cosgrave gulped down some coffee and munched at the chocolate. It revived him. He looked at the huge, dimly lighted screen that ran across the whole side of the cabin. On that screen there showed a tiny, dancing point of light that moved erratically.

"No, it's not radar," he said. "It's a step away, perhaps far ahead, of radar; or would be if it succeeded. But it has failed dismally."



"Look at it!" rang the voice of Watkins in startled awe. "Look at it!"

"Sometimes a failure proves greater than success would have been," Watkins said with unexpected compassion. Cosgrave merely smiled faintly, but the words made him think more kindly of the correspondent.

He and Lundgren were both lieutenant-commanders, or at least held that nominal rank. It was past midnight on the morning of July tenth. Behind, for miles over the dark sea-horizon, stretched the invasion fleet. Ahead, somewhere over the opposite horizon, lay Sicily. Yet he and Lund-

gren were the only two in this vast invasion force who were not part of it.

Battle and bombing conditions had been their cry; to test the device, to work it out, they must have battle conditions—with bombs and shells tearing the atmosphere apart, with airplane and tank engines rocking the ether for six miles up. No trouble about that for experts whose work was already famous, said the powers that be.

So they got what they wanted—an electronic workshop installed on the



"Three times I've called you, Father!" she cried. "Have you forgotten our Roman friend is coming to lunch?"

upper deck of the supply ship *Craesus*. From Gibraltar to Tunis, from Oran to Malta, they worked under the battle conditions they desired. Once they both got blown overboard by a Stuka's egg. And now the ship, crammed with troops, was moving in upon Sicily, and they with it.

Lundgren came into the cabin and closed the door.

"Blowing like hell, but the moon's clear," he said. "If they hadn't sent the gliders and paratroops ahead, I think they'd call the landing off; but now they must go through with it at all costs. Any luck, John? Did Eight Ninety-eight show anything?"

"No more than the rest," Cosgrave said.

"Then let's check it off and try Eight Ninety-nine!"

"I thought you had quit."

Lundgren grunted. "So did I. But I'll quit when you do, John."

"The trouble with you guys is a lack of focus," spoke up Watkins. "You've been shut up too steady with your job. You ought to get drunk, or go cruising with a bomber, or ride a camel for a couple days. Tell me what this super-duper thingum of yours aims at. But mind, don't get technical. Put it in baby-talk. I'll keep the secret, cross my heart."

Lundgren laughed. "Tell him, John, and have a smoke. I'll put in the new tubes and get started with Eight Ninety-nine. That's the number of our next experiment, Watkins. You'll maybe have the privilege of seeing our brain-child perform."

He began to change tubes and switches, according to a diagram that was pinned to a drafting-board. The

squeals and rasping static fell into silence; the throbbing of the ship's engines became perceptible. She was beginning to roll nastily, too.

"It's hard to put into baby-talk, as you call it," Cosgrave said slowly. "Up to a certain point radar is no secret; every nation has it, only ours is better. Working with these electronic waves, which bounce back from any solid object in the atmosphere and indicate distance and position, we got an idea that it would be possible to destroy other radar waves; that is to say, send out electronic impulses of our own which would neutralize and shatter those of the enemy and leave us supreme."

"You mean," said Watkins. "like blasting out another radio station?"

"Precisely; and not only to do this, but to make our own waves bounce back from fog or rain or smoke, to indicate weather at a distance—in the Aleutians, for example. If our air force knew that at a definite point a hundred or five hundred miles distant, fog or clouds would be found—you see the value. No more bombers getting caught in bad weather over their objective; or if they wanted protection there, they'd have it."

WATKINS whistled softly. "My hat, yes! And can you do it?"

"No," Cosgrave replied dejectedly. "We must find certain waves, certain frequencies, which will pierce through atmospheric disturbance of any sort, to reach their destination; and which will react from such disturbance in a definite way. We've found some damned singular things, but not what we're aiming it."

"How can you expect to?" queried Watkins, frowning. "Radar reacts from material objects that stop the waves. You're trying to get a similar reaction from immaterial objects."

"All objects are material," Cosgrave explained. "That's the whole point. We can't see oxygen, etheric waves, electricity, or even thought; but they exist and have chemical reaction. They constitute matter, in a relative sense—matter less gross than our solids, but still matter, just as fog is a form of matter, or water."

"Oh!" said Watkins. "That's why radar can't be used by submarines—can't pass through water!"

Cosgrave smiled. "Well, it couldn't until lately. It definitely can't be used by Nazi or Jap subs, anyhow. No, you've got to get a new conception of the invisible forces of nature—fog, cloud, light, electricity! There can be no motion without mass. Wind is mass or substance, as is light; whereas solidity, as we know it, is an illusion—"

"John!" The voice of Lundgren cut in upon them excitedly. "John!

We're getting something! Stand back while I switch in the extra dynamo; the spark is jumping the gap!"

Cosgrave caught the arm of Watkins and drew him away from the panels, away to the wall opposite the screen. Upon that screen was flickering a queer play of colors, indefinite and vague, yet colors. Lundgren threw a switch; a blue flame leaped across one panel, and died. The bulging electronic tubes in sight showed a queerly vibrating light, as though myriads of white-hot pinpoints were dancing across their fat grids.

"But there are no oscillations!" cried out Cosgrave, almost tragically. He sprang at the panels and began twisting a dial, then another. "What's the direction?"

"North by east; just about dead on Syracuse," Lundgren replied. "Horizon's at zero, about sea level. Want to lift it a couple of thousand feet?"

"No, no," exclaimed Cosgrave. "But this isn't what we figured. What are we getting?"

"Hanged if I know! Cut down that current, quick! Tune in the oscillators—you've got it now. You're bringing something up on the screen!"

"It's not what we want, though—"

"For cripes' sake!" rang the voice of Watkins in startled awe. "Look at it—look at it!"

All three of them looked; Lundgren caught his breath with a gasp.

A thousand flickers of color suddenly leaped across the screen, then solidified and took shape. The screen vanished; in its place was sunlight and depth and distance, as though the whole side of the cabin and ship had disappeared. They were looking at a city, but such a city as none of them had ever seen; a city of broad spaces and low, beautiful structures, sprawling over cliffs and islands and shores.

COSGRAVE twisted a dial; the city vanished in a riot of color.

"What'd you do that for?" yelled Lundgren. "Know what that city was?"

"No," said Cosgrave. "Nor how we got it—"

"Blast it, man, tune her in again! That was Syracuse as it used to be in ancient days!"

"You're crazy! It was just an illusion of light and shadow."

He knew better; he moved the dials, and the tubes squealed as though in protest. Lundgren darted an angry look at him. The nerves of both men were on edge. Cosgrave reached to the knobs, then checked himself; those supersensitive micro-dials were turning of themselves! The ship's motion was doing it, no doubt.

"It's coming again!" cried the staring Watkins. "What kind of a show is this?"

They did not answer him. Cosgrave felt a stealing touch of fear. Again sunlight and depth and distance were covering the screen. The shapes of moving men took form—men who moved among ruins and briars and cactus. Half-naked figures were cutting a path for them. The party wore flowing robes. . . .

"Romans!" said Lundgren, who had been a classical scholar. Excitement choked him. "Look at that central figure—busts of him have been preserved—see that wen on his face? That's how he got his name, Cicero—"

His voice died. The group moved along the cleared space and halted before a half-ruined monument, a plain shaft bearing only a cone and a sphere. The central figure turned and spoke in words that came to them faintly.

"There it is, my friends! The tomb of Syracuse's greatest citizen, forgotten amid the ruins! I recognized it by the sphere and cone, the geometrical symbols; let us pass to the other side and we should find an inscription. I found a copy of it in an old writer, who also described the tomb—"

In his excitement, Lundgren moved closer and his sleeve brushed the dials. Instantly the scene was distorted; it faded out, and the screen became blank. A cry of dismay escaped him.

"Do you know what that was?" he exclaimed. "The tomb of Archi-

medes! Cicero has left an account of how he discovered it; that was Cicero himself we heard speaking! John, do you realize we're picking up scenes from over two thousand years ago?"

"Picking 'em up?" cried Watkins. "Say, what kind of a hoax are you guys trying to put over on me?"

"We don't know ourselves," said Cosgrave soberly. "I told you we had run into some queer things; this is one of them. Suppose you manipulate those dials yourself, Lundgren—Hello! What's that?"

AGAIN he felt that touch of fear. Something moved on the screen; he could have sworn it was a dimly visible hand. Letters and words became visible. All this was utterly outside his whole experience; he found himself trembling. Was it possible that some sentient intelligence had been wakened out of the ether by these powerful frequencies? Had these only half-understood electronic powers, like a sorcerer's incantations, evoked from the invisible some astral force beyond human ken?

"Why, that's Latin! I used to study it," exclaimed Watkins. "What does A.U.C. mean?"

Lundgren spoke steadily, quietly, but his very steadiness betrayed his effort at self-control.

"That's the Roman computation of time. John, I'm not touching the





"Hail, daughter of Archimedes!" Marcus Claudius greeted her.

dials; the thing is doing it, itself. Let's leave it strictly alone and see what happens. The current is coming through evenly and strongly—"

"Do you know what that stuff means?" broke in Watkins.

"Yes. The year 212 B.C., as we would term it. That's the year when Syracuse, the greatest city in the ancient world, was captured and sacked by the Romans. She had allied herself with Carthage, and Rome sent the consul Marcellus, a noble and tragic figure, to attack her."

His voice droned on like that of a professor lecturing. During two years Marcellus had blockaded Syracuse, a huge city composed of five other cities in one. The Romans had been out-fought at every turn. Old King Hiero, now dead, had employed the great mathematician Archimedes to build war-engines, which now came into frightful savage employment. They were strange, incomprehensible ma-

chines and engines, killing attackers by the hundred under showers of missiles and huge stones, sinking the Roman galleys or burning them as they came in under the walls of the harbor.

The Romans gave up the useless battle against a master of geometry and wizardry, as they called it, and settled down to a blockade. A year passed, and another. Fighting became infrequent. Flags of truce passed back and forth. The Roman camp was like a sixth city outside the impregnable walls. There was even visiting back and forth.

"Those Greeks of Syracuse could well afford to laugh at the Romans," went on Lundgren. "The inhabitants numbered hundreds of thousands. The riches of the whole known world had been gathered here; supplies of food and munitions were vast. The city could hold out for years. Meantime, Carthaginian armies were in

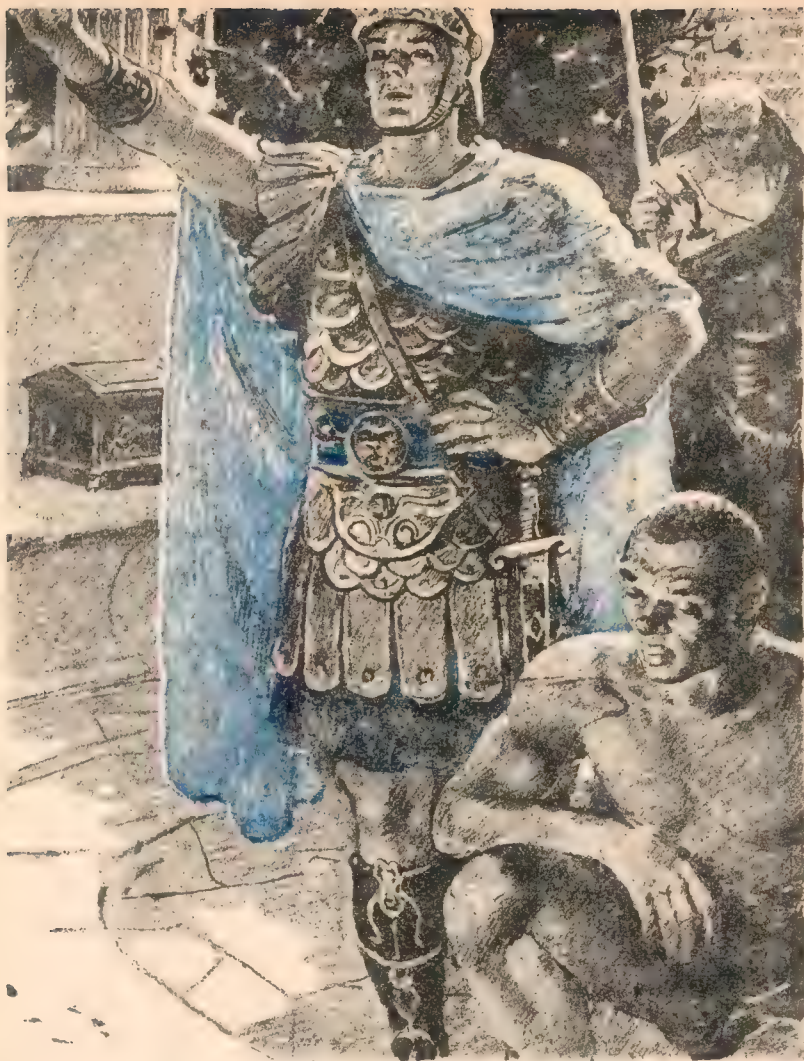
Italy, and Hannibal was at the gates of Rome. So why worry? Time was on the side of Syracuse—"

"It's gone!" yelled Watkins.

So it was. The screen was blank. Cosgrave watched and waited, a chill at his spine. That blue spark was jumping steadily across the panel; he had the certainty that something, some unseen force, was at work here, and he was afraid of this unknown thing he had helped to create.

They had understood the voice and words of that Roman, Cicero. How? He was simply unable to grasp it. Looking for one thing, they had found another, after nine hundred experiments with the unseen powers of the universe. Something—or some one—

"Steady, old man!" He found Lundgren's hand on his arm, Lundgren's voice at his ear. "Whatever this is, we've done it, we've caused it; therefore we're masters of it"



A good thought; a good thing to remember. Cosgrave looked at the screen more calmly. It was fading away again, disappearing under a growing play of light. Depth and sunlight and color were taking shape before them. Through all this pierced laughter and voices; the name of Archimedes reached them. Archimedes—ah, that was the geometrician whom Lundgren had mentioned.

There stood a woman, laughing, beside a pomegranate bush. She was eating one of the dusky crimson fruits. "That's three times I've called you, Father!" she cried. "There was a time when your daughter was more important than your geometrical figures!"

A man, tall and spare and with deep eyes under his high brow, sat on a stool. He was intent upon a flat bed of fine screened sand in which his stick had drawn lines. He looked up at her; the abstraction faded from his face, and his eyes twinkled.

"That was when she was a helpless child; now she gives me orders," he said, smiling. "Well, you've attained your object; my train of thought is broken. What do you want, Lais?"

"Have you forgotten that our Roman friend is coming to lunch? He'll be here any minute. I heard the trumpets at the gate blowing for a truce."

"All right, all right," rejoined the man. Once more he leaned over the sand-box and began to trace new lines with his stick. "Entertain him till I've solved this problem."

Lais threw the pomegranate husk at him.

"Wake up, dreamer!" she cried gayly. "Go and shave and get into a clean robe! He'll think Archimedes is some unwashed slave, rather than the greatest man in the world! And you never finished the idea you began to tell me last night."

Without irritation, for nobody could be irritated at this glowing fig-

ure of loveliness, Archimedes rose resignedly and looked at her.

"What idea was that, beautiful tyrant?"

"About the Romans and us—the harsh, brutal, bloody Romans who are like wild beasts, and us Greeks who love culture and art and beauty! They've been trying for two years to conquer us and can't—yet you said that they will and must! Why?"

He nodded gravely.

"Because, my dear, brute force always conquers science and culture and ideals—for a time. These Romans are barbarians who know only one thing: Force. So, by force and treachery and ruthless slaughter they will overcome us and Sicily and Carthage and Greece, for a time. Then their turn will come."

"Who'll conquer them, then?"

"Force conquers ideals but cannot destroy them; in the end, they will destroy force itself. This is the basic theme of certain of the Mysteries. It could even be expressed symbolically by geometry. Let's see—the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides—"

"Stop it!" cried out Lais. "There you go again; stop it! For the love of the gods, will you go shave and dress? And don't you dare repeat your performance before the ambassadors of Carthage!"

He wrinkled up his brow at her. "Eh? What performance?"

"Don't you remember how you showed up in the forum stark naked, with a razor in one hand and a marked sphere in the other, and your face all—"

He obeyed her and departed, shaking his head abstractedly and with a forefinger tracing lines in his palm as he moved along. Lais blew a kiss after him. He was the noblest and kindest of men, but he lived in a world of abstraction—rather, in worlds beyond the world. He, it was said, talked with the gods as though they were men.

A SLAVE came running, to say that the guest had arrived under escort. Romans might and did come into the city under flag of truce, as this particular man had come more than once; but only under guard. Lais smoothed back her hair and ordered the guest brought here, to the garden.

She waited by the fishpond and fountain. Here were marble benches with cushions, and a table under the orange tree, with silver cups and chilled wine and cakes. She saw the Roman coming—that fine figure with the head held high had no equal. He was by no means young; indeed, he was a bit bald and the hair at his

temples was gray. Yet she turned eagerly to greet him, with eyes radiant as stars, her breath coming a bit faster.

This Marcus Claudius, said to be an officer on the staff of the consul himself, was held in the highest esteem by Archimedes, and by Lais as well. He possessed qualities hitherto unknown among Romans; an appreciation of the beautiful, a pure and lofty nobility of thought and word and action, a sincere and frank admiration for Greek culture and science. In his presence, age and rank and race were forgotten.

"Hail, daughter of Archimedes!" he greeted her. "Beauty is truly the child of genius, and wisdom of the father of loveliness!"

She gave him her hands and a flashing glance from her radiant eyes.

"Was it hard to think up that pretty speech, Roman?"

"Well, it did take some thought!" he confessed, smiling. "We soldiers don't run to fine words, but you'd inspire a stone image to rhapsody. Where's your father?"

"Shaving; he forgot you were coming, as usual. Take off that armor; I'll help. A cup of wine, already mixed. Then we can go up to the wall for your favorite view."

Defly, she helped to loosen the straps of his cuirass, and put his helmet on the bench beside it. He sighed and relaxed gratefully, and took the cup she handed him. A quick gesture spilled a few drops on the ground, as oblation to the gods; then he drank.

He had a bony, harshly carved face that betrayed a will of iron; yet so remarkable in its winning charm, so eloquent of nobility and almost of majesty, as to turn the bitterest Roman-hater into an instant friend. Personality, this might have been called in another age. Such men created the legends of gods who walked the earth.

"AND what has your consul been about lately?" asked Lais, refilling his cup with mixed wine and water.

"Oh, Marcellus? A rascal, a fool, a poor tormented devil who means well, and is caught between Roman superstition and Roman rapacity; his enemies are legion, and the greatest is himself," said Marcus, not without bitterness. "Speak not of him. Let's go to the wall and see the second fairest sight in the world, before Archimedes comes."

She turned, with him. "The second? But I thought you said Syracuse was the most beautiful of all scenes on earth?"

He smiled, and his tired eyes became youthful and shining as they touched upon her.

"Not so lovely as you, Lais," he said, with such earnest meaning that color

crept into her cheeks. They were walking down the path to the end of the garden, where a section of the city walls closed in the grounds, with stairs that mounted to the parapet.

"Strange you should speak like that of your great Marcellus," she said. "He, the hero, the only Roman who ever received a triumph for killing an enemy king with his own hand!"

"Not the only one; but the first in hundreds of years," the Roman corrected her. "Ah, this is a sweet place! It rests one's very soul to breathe this garden air. Tell me, Lais; why have you not married?"

"Blunt Roman!" she rejoined, laughing. "For the best of reasons; no one loves the daughter of Archimedes. Or perhaps the daughter of Archimedes has found no one worthy of sharing her father's love."

The steps were before them. He slipped his arm about her waist and lifted her; she yielded to the pressure. They mounted together, thus, and his arm tightened. She could feel the iron-hard muscles about her waist. He was aware of her yielding, of her quickened breath. Something passed between them, silent and unseen. No word was said, none was needed.

They came to the parapet and stood motionless, close together; the fingers of Lais plucked at the strong arm around her, and closed on it silently and held it fast. Below them was the sea; here the wall ran along the cliffs of Acradina. Behind and above was the highest of the five cities, Epipolae, its temples lifting along the rocky crest. Here was Acradina, noblest of the five; below lay outstretched the temples and buildings of Neapolis, the newest city, with its colossal bronze statue of Apollo and the temple of Ceres; there too was the lofty theater, the largest in Sicily. Beyond lay Tyche, so named from the temple to Fortune in its midst; and below was the Great Port with its impregnable island city of Ortygia, splendid with palaces and temples and arsenals, and above all the magnificent palace of Agathocles, the largest and most splendid structure known to the world.

The scene held them silent and marveling, though to neither was it new. A party of guards came trotting along the wall. Marcus loosed his arm, and when they had passed, pointed to where the walls dropped down, inland, at the Agrarian Gate, beyond which lay the Roman camp.

"There, tomorrow evening, an exchange of prisoners takes place," he said. His voice was strangely unsteady. His hand moved; now he pointed to the fortress at the Water Gate, directly below them. It was a little fortress, a beautiful spot untouched by war amid a grove of towering trees.

"And there's where I came in just now," he said. "It's far from any scene of attack; it's not well guarded and is remote from danger. I saw a tiny postern beside the gate, as I entered. Would it be possible for you to come down there tomorrow night?"

She was trembling a little, "Yes," she said, low-voiced. "Sometimes I go down to the grove of trees when the moon is high. It's a grove sacred to Athene. Often our people use it of nights for peaceful meetings; they use the postern gate, too, to reach the fishing-boats there in the bay. No one cares. Slight watch, if any, is kept there. It will be very lovely tomorrow night, when the moon comes to the full."

CONSTRAINED silence held them for a space. The face of Marcus had become tight and drawn, as though with some deep inward emotion; his hand touched that of Lais and closed upon it with a grip that hurt.

"I'm sorry," he exclaimed, at her slight cry. "I forgot." He lifted her hand and kissed it quickly. "When the moon rises, look for me," he added, and turned. "Come! We must get back, before your father immerses himself anew in his problems and forgets us."

Neither of them spoke again, as they descended to the garden.

Archimedes was there. He came striding to greet them, gladness springing in his austere face and lighting his deep eyes.

"The first of the Romans!" he cried almost gayly.

Marcus gave him a startled glance. "What? Why do you say that?"

Archimedes laughed. "My friend, you're the first among that barbarous people to appreciate beauty and culture and art. You're the first crack in the armor of brute force! Never before has a Roman been known to listen to the verses of Homer, or to talk of higher ideals, or to look twice at any form of art."

"True, we've not so much as a statue at Rome," said Marcus. "Yet I hear Marcellus has sworn to remove to Rome all the statues and beautiful things of Syracuse, after he takes your city."

"They're safe for a long time," dryly rejoined the geometrician. Well, come along; lunch is ready and I'm starving!"

"Naturally; you forgot your breakfast," Lais said, laughing. "It was there untasted and the pigeons were eating it, when we did the morning cleaning. But you hadn't forgotten to draw charcoal diagrams all over the table!"

Archimedes laughed heartily with them. Throughout the meal he gave no sign of his usual abstraction, for

he was intent upon the visitor. The Roman's naïve admiration for his genius pleased him, since he had his vain side; but he was interested in probing deeply into this man whose peculiar qualities fascinated him.

"The gods have destined you for greatness," he said, when they came back into the garden and mixed a bowl of fresh wine. "Or else you're a man, already half a god, who comes here pretending to be an ordinary mortal. Deny it not!"

Marcus looked startled, then broke into a harsh laugh.

"On the contrary! I'm actually the basest of men. I'm forced by circumstances, by duty, to actions that horrify me. I'm driven along by forces beyond my control."

"Then it is the doing of the gods; blame them, not yourself." Archimedes uttered this fatal sophistry rather mechanically; he was not particularly pious. "Tomorrow night we celebrate the festival of Athene, here in the city. Sacrifice to her, pray to her, for wisdom and help."

The Roman's lips curled a trifle.

"Bah! Why saddle the gods with our own shortcomings? What I must do now and in the future is done by my own decision. I may regret it, I may be forced into doing it, but mine is the blame."

"Again I say, first of the Romans!" exclaimed Archimedes. "Brute force knows no morality; you are the first of the barbarians to be aware of moral scruples, my friend. This, too, might be expressed in a proposition of mystical symbolism: If the hypotenuse—"

"Father! Spare us geometry!" cried out Lais. Her gaze went to the Roman. "Take his advice, Marcus. I'll help. Tomorrow night I shall offer prayer and a sacrifice to the goddess, on your behalf."

A light sweat bedewed the Roman's forehead; yet his iron will brought smiling words to his lips, and he lifted his winecup with steady hand.

"To the goddess Athene, or as we name her, Dianal" he said.

Upon this he abruptly abandoned personalities, and besought Archimedes for the secret of how a grappling-hook on a line had lifted Roman galleys from the water and overturned them. Archimedes laughed.

"Merely an application of the right principle, my friend. Just so with the other mysteries, as you deem them, that sank your ships and killed your men. When I showed King Hieron how one man could move a ship crowded with soldiers, he put me to work. Merely an application of natural laws to physical problems."

"But you set fire to our ships with the sunlight itself!"

"Your ships were under the wall, the sun was over the wall; I simply ex-



Illustrated by
Maurice Bower

"Quiet!" he commanded. "It's an assault. They're in the city itself. You're in no danger. They have their orders—"

tended a sheet of glass that focused the sun's rays. The Chaldeans used a ground glass to study the stars; so do the Egyptian priests, though they have kept the secret close."

Trumpets sounded from the little sea-gate by the temple grove, and Marcus departed, with an escort that came for him. Archimedes saw him off, then came back and settled down with a contented sigh beside his box of sand.

"What a godlike man he is!" said Lais. Her father grunted.

"True; but he is caught between good and evil. How? I don't know. Don't bother me; I must have this problem worked out before the council meets tonight."

THE next day was fair, warm, windless; the night promised to be magnificent. All five cities were agog with the celebration of the festival. In Tyche and Ortygia lay the greatest temples of Athene; the little ancient shrine here in Acradina was of less consequence, but Lais loved it, and loved the beautiful old sacred grove behind it that stretched to the walls and gate.

With darkness, Lais took two doves for sacrifice, and went down to the old temple. It was crowded, but she gained admittance to the inner shrine, interviewed a priestess, and made arrangements; then waited for her prayer to be delivered by the chief priestess. There were many before her, and the wait was long, but she was in no haste.

The torches lit the statue of Athene, with her owl perched on her shoulder. The priestesses danced, or rather gravely stepped, about the altar, chanting their invocation:

*"Gray-eyed goddess and your owl,
Gray-eyed goddess and your owl—"*

And the chief priestess carried on the simple, ancient ritual:

*"Come into our hearts,
Come, in the smoke of sacrifice,
Come over the sea
To bring men wisdom!"*

Then the full chorus swelled up:

*"Goddess of light, goddess of light,
Advance and join our measured step.
Hear us, oh hear us,
Gray-eyed goddess, hear us!"*

After this came whatever prayer was being offered; then the chanting was repeated, and so on until seven prayers had been offered. The old temple was not remarkable; the singing was not beautiful; the ritual was not elaborate—and yet there was something about it all wonderfully impressive, going back to primeval times when the deity was an actual force and not a stone image.

A dark cloak about her, Lais stole through the grove,—the same grove where great Plato had walked and taught,—and came to the walls and gates. Originally, the grove had extended on to the shore, but the city walls had been built right through it. The gates were of course closed, but two soldiers stood beside the little postern gate. Cloak veiling her face, Lais came to them and dropped silver coins into their hands.

"Let me out, good friends, and when the moon is high I'll return."

They laughed. "Ha! Not to worship the chaste Athene, I'll be bound!" said one. "Well, I know how it is—no patrols in the outer grove to bother a lad and a lass, eh? Out you go, little turtledove, and don't let the moon bewitch you!"

The postern was not even quite closed. They drew it open, and she slipped outside, and crossed to the rim of trees skirting the shore. The moon was trembling below the sea horizon, her radiance mounting above it. A quick, firm step, a subdued clank of armor, and Lais turned to meet the cloaked figure.

"Marcus!"

They met, and wordless, embraced.

But, after a long time had passed, they found words enough. They were in a little niche among the trees where warm sand and leaf-mould had softened the hard rock. Marcus had laid his arms aside. Behind them the city was completely shut out by the green depths. Before them lay the shore, the rippling sea upon the rocks, the harbor islands, all bathed in golden glory beneath the high-soaring moon. She pressed her cheek against the hard shaven cheek of Marcus.

"How did it happen, my Roman? I never intended it to be—like this."

"Only the gods know," he answered, and kissed her. "It was destiny."

She echoed the fond foolish word beloved of lovers, and sighed happily, and her arms tightened around him. All reality had gone; they were drifting upon dream and moonlight.

"Marcus Claudius! How curt and harsh, so unlike our soft Greek names! Yet it is yours, so I love it. The name of your consul, Marcellus—now that's a nice-sounding name."

He laughed shortly. "It means martial, warlike. He's a harsh fellow. But he has sworn an oath that no harm shall come to your father when Syracuse is taken. Indeed, he has given orders that no citizens of the city shall be slain, because he seeks to honor your father."

Merriment rippled from her lips. "Oh, how confident you are of victory, my Roman! It cannot happen, ever!"

"If the gods so decree, it can happen this very night!" he said in a strange,

hard voice. "That little fortress here at the gate is poorly guarded; I've noticed it myself. Men could come in boats and attack it any time. Why not this very night, when everyone is celebrating the festival and no attack would be suspected? Why, the city would be taken before anyone knew it!"

She laughed. "Is war always foremost in your thought—even now?"

"Forgive me; let us forget all such things!" he said contritely. "Tell me about yourself, your dead mother, the things you love and are, the future you dream about—no, no, not the future," he added hastily, almost in fear. "I want so desperately to escape from war! It's the only life I've ever known—"

Lais was all poetry; her existence was steeped in it. In Sicily a greater Greece had blossomed, reaching new heights of culture and beauty, expressing itself in worship of poetry as its truest form of art.

To these things she turned his thoughts, from war and alarms, as the moon swam higher and the far-spread sea became enchanted silver. The tender magic of her voice blended with the spells of the lipping wavelets and the murmurous air. Somewhere amid the trees an owl, the wise bird of the goddess, hooted mournfully.

SHE told Marcus the story of the man born blind who had, in consequence, the power of inner vision, and who sang of Ilios and Odysseus the wanderer.

Not those silly legends of him which passed current in these later days, but the older and truer story now almost forgotten, and only remembered by students of the lost dark past.

She told of the ancient Greek tongue still surviving in Thessaly, a tongue so old that it had no vowel sound for *ae*, though it was later merged into Greek; and how Homer had taken the words of forgotten poets in this old tongue, and upon them had woven his wondrous wizardry. She sang snatches of the ancient tongue, and then snatches of Homer's poems, and if Marcus understood not the words her mellow accents enmeshed his soul in beauty none the less.

"The blind man was born in Acharnia, and died at Grakias in Pontus, and lies buried somewhere in the Golden Chersonese, but these things are forgotten now," she said. "All his life he was a wanderer, and in death his memory has found no home, for all Greece claims him. This is fame, my hero; the blind man will be remembered for his words of vision, when great Marcellus and Hannibal and other soldiers are quite forgotten."

"Who cares?" said he, holding her close. "Fame or infamy matter no

one lives only for today. We live only for this enchanted hour, my blessed one; we were created for it from the beginning. Speak again your blind man's words about the hero whose heart hungered for love and home—"

Her voice murmured on, until at length it fell silent once more, and the cold moon climbed her way amid the stars that carpeted the night around her. For them both existed no longer time and space nor moonlight nor starry sea; just each other.

IN the darkness under the cliffs, where fell deep shadow, small blots drifted like aimless boats; but they were not aimless. From the dark landing to the trees, moved an unending line of flitting shadows; but they were not shadows. Across the open space to the postern gate darted one or two figures, then a few more; hereupon the little postern gate stood wide open, and the moonlight struck upon mailed figures that poured across the clear space and in through the opening, and more, and ever more. Within the walls, all was silent except the far voices of temple singers.

Suddenly a strident sound came reaching across the night, at first faint, then more loudly as it spread and spread afar—the clangor and clash of axe and sword on helm and buckler. Cries merged into it and lifted it; the screaming of women, the deeper shouts of men. The war-cry of Rome blended with it, then alarm-trumpets caught it up with brazen voice.

Lais started up with one wild cry. Marcus caught her and held her.

"Quiet!" he commanded. "It's an assault; they have the gate, the wall. They're in the city itself. You're in no danger, Lais! They have their orders—"

She turned to him. She shrank from his grasp. The wan moonlight of morning touched her face and showed its fear and horror.

"Assault—their orders—then you knew! You knew!"

"Of course I did," he said soothingly. "Don't fear, don't stir; you're safe with me. No harm will come to you or yours, my blessed one—"

A gasp escaped her; a gasping, incoherent sound of passionate comprehension. Her hand struck him across the face. She broke from him. Swooping on the sword and belt that lay beside his steel helmet, she caught it up, freed the weapon, and was gone in among the trees like a dryad.

Marcus plunged after her. He shouted, called to her, won through the trees and saw her running toward the postern gate, where a file of soldiers were entering. He shouted at them to stop her; no use. She hurled herself bodily at them, the sword in her hand striking wild vain blows. A

burly Etruscan shortened his spear and drove it through her.

Then they saw the face of Marcus as he came, and recognizing him, scattered in wild fear and panic. . . .

In the bright morning sunlight, the consul Marcellus stood with his staff around him on the wall of Acradina. The upper city was won; his troops were everywhere; Syracuse had fallen to the hand of Rome, and there remained only to conquer the lower cities and harbors.

He stood, bareheaded, his face like iron; the commanders awaited the word from him to loose the legions for the sack of the city. A centurion, one of his own men from Latium, came striding hastily up and saluted him.

"Well?" said Marcellus. "Your errand is accomplished? He is safe?"

The centurion shook his head. "Some of the Gaulish auxiliaries were there before us. He was dead when we got there; one of them had killed him."

"That makes it complete; no more was needed," murmured the consul. He lifted his toga to hide his face. He gave way; his shoulders shook, tears were on his cheeks. The men around exchanged glances.

Marcellus, they said then and later, shed bitter tears over the beauty of the great city which was doomed to sack and ruin at his hand. Marcellus—he had been born Marcus, of the Claudian family. . . .

The three men in the cabin on the upper deck of the *Cræsus* clung stupefied as a sudden wild lurch of the ship almost took the floor from under them. The lights on the screen danced and clashed and exploded. A sharp cry burst from Lundgren.

"A tube blew out, John!"

"Tube, hell!" shouted Watkins. "We're dodging dive-bombers—listen there!"

The vessel shook as its ack-ack guns opened up; then they fell silent. Watkins made a dash for the open air, and

the door slammed behind him. Lundgren looked at his fellow scientist.

"Aren't you going to replace that tube?"

"Not now," said Cosgrave. His face was gray and haggard; daylight was stealing in at the window. "Did you see what I saw—and heard?"

"Yes. What in thunderation have we got hold of?"

"Search me. I don't savvy it at all. I still think I'm out of my head. We aimed the indicator at Syracuse—and we got Syracuse, the city of more than two millenniums ago. Let's leave this experiment where it is and get a breath of air to clear our brains."

They got outside, and joined Watkins at the rail, staring.

The sun was still lingering under the horizon. There was Sicily ahead, mountains tipped with daylight, Etna's snowy crest catching the first sunbeams. On the line of beach, small assault craft were moving in and out by the hundreds. Farther out, the whole sea back over the horizon was spotted with ships.

A roar burst forth; flame spurted to right and left. Shells burst along the sky—enemy dive-bombers were coming in.

Fighters were meeting these, high up, and guns were belching at them. Italian shore-batteries began to open, and certain of the ships sent salvos back at them.

"This is it!" yelled Watkins excitedly. "Say, what was that stuff we saw in there?"

"Imagination," said Cosgrave. He met the gaze of Lundgren and a silent message passed between them; then Lundgren nodded.

The correspondent grunted, then forgot everything else as a bomb hit the water a hundred yards away. He departed for the lower decks at a gallop. Lundgren came over, beside Cosgrave and spoke, under his breath.

"Imagination—like hell! We'll have to work at that thing, John; we'll have to push it through and find out what we've got!"

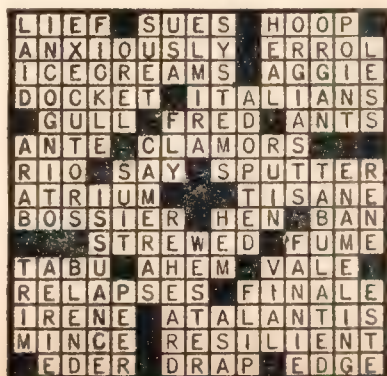
COSGRAVE nodded slightly. "Did you feel a strange sense of intelligence at work, in there?" he asked. "As though we had roused some unknown force?"

"No," snapped Lundgren. "That's all nonsense, John. I can't explain it, of course; but we're dealing with practical science, with agencies we know and use. Once we get a grip on this, we'll find there's no mystery in it."

"Maybe," said Cosgrave.

Maybe; he doubted it. He was not sure of anything. He could not forget that man with the face of iron, with tortured eyes—the conqueror, shedding tears for all he had won and lost. . . . The first of the Romans.

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 21



Dead Man's Hat

MACKAY walked out to the end of the stubby dock, leaving the hard cobbles behind him. Front Street, under the wan moon, was deserted and touched with magic. The dingy, disreputable old buildings were dark, but their age and shabbiness were lost; once more they took on the air of past generations and the solid respectability of a day when Dead End kids were unknown and East River commerce went out to all the world.

A drunk reclined against a bollard; Mackay envied his blissful unconsciousness. Such rest was denied him. The world had gone to pieces, and he with it. Across the river glittered the lights of Brooklyn and the Navy Yard; trains roared high across the Bridge. A lone figure paced at the end of the dock, a smallish figure crowned by a derby hat. Mackay paused, lit his last cigarette, and watched the swirling dark water as he sucked smoke into his lungs. . . . Last smoke gone, last dollar gone, last hope gone. . . .

The derby-crowned figure was approaching. It halted. He got an impression of age from the wheezy, uncertain, almost apologetic voice.

"Mister, can you spare me a light?"

"Sure," said Mackay, handing over a match booklet.

The recipient chuckled. "Well, it aint so bad! You're a few matches ahead of me, anyhow."

The truth of the words drew a laugh from Mackay.

"And if you can still laugh," went on the other, "you aint lost everything." He bit at a cigar, spat out the end and struck a match.

The flame in the cupped hands revealed pale blue eyes under shaggy gray brows in a lantern-jawed face. Wisps of unkempt gray hair showed below the derby hat-rim. The man tossed away the match. The aroma of his cigar almost startled Mackay with its quality; he was, or had been, a judge of tobacco. The man jerked a thumb at the dark buildings.

"I've got a shop over there. What about crackers and cheese and beer?"

"Gladly, very gladly!" said Mackay promptly. He had not eaten since breakfast.

He followed the other man back to the street; they paused at a store entry. A second-hand store. A strolling cop,

or he might have been a guard of some kind, came past and threw a flashlight beam at them.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Widsun! Good night," said he.

"Good night, sir, and let's hope it's a bombers' moon over Italy like it is here," was the reply. Then the door opened, and Widsun spoke again. "Throw away that blasted reefer, Mister. It doesn't smell so good. Wait a jiffy till I get a light on out back."

Mackay tossed his cigarette into the street; it was no reefer, but it was a cheap smoke. A dim light showed at the back of the store. He made his way past furniture and riffraff in general, and came into a bare, neat little room holding chairs and table and a refrigerator. In one corner stood an immense antique iron safe, across which ran the legend:

HIRAM WIDSUN, USED GOODS.

On the wall was a flyspecked Liberty Loan poster that by its looks had been there ever since the last war.

Mr. Widsun went to the refrigerator and opened it.

"Sit down, Mr. Mackay, sit down. Would you sooner have milk than beer?"

"I sure would! —Hello!" Mackay was startled once more. "How'd you know my name?"

"Talk later. Never talk empty, is my motto. I'm a great hand for my vittles, sir." Widsun had his head inside the refrigerator, derby and all. "If your stummick aint set, your brain aint up to snuff."

So saying, he transferred to the table milk, beer, crackers, butter and cheese, and with a pleased sigh of anticipation slammed the refrigerator door and settled himself in a chair. Judging glasses unnecessary, Mackay opened the milk and drank from the bottle. Widsun did the same with the beer; they attacked the crackers and cheese.

Mackay did not know what to make of his host. The queer cavernous features were almost unlined, like those of an old Arab; they had no expression. The nose was large and bony; the lips were smooth; the square chin, stubbled with gray, was determined. The derby, the baggy garments, the pale blue eyes looked tired and old. The man did not speak good English;

he was apologetic, almost humble; and yet he somehow ate into one's consciousness like acid.

"Well, how'd you know my name?" demanded Mackay, his mouth full.

Widsun looked at him, without the least trace of expression. "Last night, and the night before, you been prowling around them docks," came the asthmatic voice. "My stummick aint in good shape, and I prowl considerable myself; but when others do it, I want to know why. So I looked you up, sir, and here we are. Curiosity is its own reward, as old Cap'n Trun-ion used to say."

So this old duffer had looked him up, eh? Mackay was amused; he went on eating, for he was ravenous. Probably Widsun had trailed him back to the Mills Hotel. But why? He was taking another gulp of milk when Widsun spoke again:

"Washington announced today that they've completed arrangements with Japan for the exchange of all civilian prisoners."

An electric thrill shot through Mackay. He spluttered; the milk went down the wrong way; he coughed and wiped his chin.

"No!" he cried. "No! Is that true?"

"True as Gospel, sir. Good news comes when least expected, don't it?"

Mackay was transformed. His dark, tensed, bitter-lined features relaxed; a new glint came into his eyes; his pulses leaped; his breath came faster.

"How did you know what this—this means to me?" he demanded.

"Told you I looked you up, sir," repeated the imperturbable Widsun. "Everything."

THE one word held a lot. In China when the war burst, Mackay had sent his wife and two children to Hong Kong; he never heard from them again. He had ended up in Burma, fighting; wounds and sickness laid him out. Later he got back to America—family gone, money gone, health gone. A job with the old firm had ended in disaster; it was a charity job. He had chucked it finally and come to New York. Here he had touched bottom.

At the moment, it did not occur to him as strange that this fellow Widsun had found out so much about him in so short a time. He was thinking of his family.

It solves a strange mystery in this remarkable novelette

by Michael Gallister



"We can't know, of course—I never heard from her—"

"Oh! She's safe. And the kids too," said Widsun. "I met a chap, a diplomat, who had seen 'em a few months back. He had come home with the first lot. Here, smoke up." He produced cigars, long, thin, evil-looking weeds; their aroma was heavenly. "I aint no blasted philanthrope-ist, or whatever you call it," he wheezed on. "The war's hit me hard. Took my best men and left me up a dead end, sure enough. If you aint above takin' a bit of work, it'll pay good, only it's ticklish."

"Illegal? A lot I'd care about that!" Mackay said.

"Oh, it aint that, though it might run close," Mr. Widsun confessed. "The fact is, sir, the secondhand business ties in with some queer angles—with crooked stevedores, cargo-thieves, mugging and what-not. Small fry and big fry too. Money aint worth spilling blood for, is my notion; but plenty hold otherwise. I have a deal on right now with a coffee broker downtown, and you'd be surprised the sort of things it runs into. But you'd be the man to handle it for me. —Excuse me, sir."

A PHONE had buzzed in the shop. Widsun rose and went to answer. There was no door between; only a dirty old curtain.

Mackay lighted his cigar, savoring it with appreciation, yet unable to pin his thoughts to anything except that wonderful news. Jenny and the children safe and well, the way home opening to them! Thank God! A sudden shock stopped his brain; they were coming back to destitution, to absolute poverty.

"Yes, this is Hiram Widsun," came the wheezy voice from the store. "Oh, Bellevue! You have? Is he bad hurt?"

Oh. Well, you put the surgeon on the wire quick. . . . Guarantee? Of course I will. Don't put him in no ward. Give him a private room, the best you got. Dr. Parkins knows me. Now get me that surgeon, and quick about it." Vaguely, Mackay was conscious of a change in the voice. It had wakened into driving command. "Hello! Yes; Doctor. . . . No chance for him? All right. You put the best specialists on the case, best men you can get. Damn the expense! I'll send his insurance papers over to be made out. . . . But mind, I want the best men in the city called in! All right."

Widsun came into the back room wiping sweat from his lean features. He dropped into his chair, picked up his cigar, threw it into a corner.

"Blast it!" he broke out. His face showed no emotion, but anger filled his eyes. "You heard. Murdered, that's what he was! Murdered by Sanchard

—that blasted coffee broker! It's a risky job, Mr. Mackay. There's ten grand in it if you win; but you may damned easily lose."

Ten grand—ten thousand dollars! Mackay tensed to the incredible words.

An electric push-button was set in the wall under the Liberty Loan poster. Widsun pressed it. After a moment, a door at the back of the little room opened and a young man appeared. His broad features indicated that he was American-Chinese.

"Hop up to Bellevue," said Widsun. "Mr. Sinclair's there, dying. See to all arrangements. Order plenty o' flowers; dead folks like flowers. Pay in cash."

"Yes sir," said the young man, and withdrew. Widsun wiped his face again, put away his handkerchief, gulped down some beer, and his pale blue eyes settled on Mackay. "Well sir, you see how it is," he said dolefully. "Luck is a matter of keeping your eyes open, as old Cap'n Trunion used to say. Poor Mr. Sinclair was hit by a truck; it wasn't no accident."

Mackay swallowed hard. "Did you say ten—ten thousand—"

"Dollars. Yes sir. Half in advance, and a hundred for expenses."

"It's a deal."

Swinging around, Widsun tugged at the safe door. It was unlocked and came open. He brought out a cigar-box, opened this, and began to count money from a fat sheaf of banknotes, all fifties or larger. He shoved these across the table and replaced the cigar-box.

"And—what do I do?" asked Mackay, fingering the heap of money incredulously.

"Get a good night's sleep, sir, and a hearty breakfast. Don't breathe to a soul that you ever heard of me. Walk into the office of Sanchard at eleven tomorrow morning, sharp, and give him this card."

Widsun extended a none-too-clean calling card on which was printed the name of *Thomas H. Elder*. Beneath this was penciled the name of Bartolomeo Sanchard and the office address of Brazil Imports, Inc., followed by an illegible signature. Widsun put the end of a stubby finger on this signature.

"Herman Frick of New Orleans—that's him. He sent you. The card proves it. You're Mr. Elder. Now excuse me a minute, sir, till I get my accounts with Sanchard brought up to date."

He produced a pencil-end and a small black notebook, fingered the pages, put down the little notebook, and wrote. Mackay stared at the card. When his host finished writing, he asked a question:

"What if the real Elder shows up?"

"He won't. Not till Judgment Day," said Widsun. His pale blue eyes were hard and cold.

"Oh. And what am I supposed to do?"

"Whatever Sanchard says, sir. A friend of mine will get in touch with you. He'll have one of my own cards, like this." Widsun produced another printed card. Once more incredulous, Mackay saw that it bore his own name, and in the corner, the words:

With Hiram Widsun, Used Goods, Front Street.

"My name!" he exclaimed. "But—why, you must have expected that—"

HIS gaze met the pale blue eyes and saw a glint of warmth in them; a glint that became a sparkle and deepened into a genuine twinkle. But the cavernous face changed not.

"I had my hopes, sir. You'll get this card later on; might be dangerous just now."

"No other instructions?"

"Well, don't take Sanchard for a fool." Widsun handed over a key with a hotel tag. "I've got a room here for Thomas H. Elder; use it. And mind, don't communicate with me!"

Mackay gulped the last of his milk, stood up, and extended his hand.

"I don't know what to be most grateful for—the information, the supper, or the job! Thanks, with all my heart."

Hiram Widsun pushed back his derby and shook hands, without rising.

"I'm glad you didn't mention the money, sir. Keep money in its place, is my notion, and its place aint between friends. Good night and good luck! Let yourself out front. The door locks itself. I'll be seeing you."

Mackay somewhat dazedly, groped his way toward the street, with fifty-one hundred dollars in his pocket, and in his soul the assurance that the chill night air would waken him from a queerly twisted dream. Even when he had reached Mr. Elder's hotel and gained his luxurious room, he did not believe it.

But there came no awakening. Instead, he had suddenly found something to live for; he was no longer a futile, weary failure. The whole world was different! The strange thing was this secondhand dealer who seemed to handle money like water, and who was engaged in some life-or-death feud with a coffee broker. The man was unreal and fantastic.

Widsun had certainly done an astounding job of investigating a perfect stranger; but this was a minor item. That card printed with his own name was what knocked Mackay for a loop. When he wakened in the morning, he was still thinking about it; but

his thoughts soon took a new slant as he glanced through his morning paper. A man named Sinclair had been fatally injured in a traffic accident on Eighth Avenue near Fifteenth Street—not a block from the address of Sanchard! This knocked reality into Mackay; he rose, bathed and dressed.

Widsun was an eccentric; an eccentric old duffer with money. But how good that supper had been! Well, play the old duffer's game; if he needed a fighter, he had found himself one! With a laugh, Tom Mackay went down to breakfast, a new man. His dark eyes were alight, his dark features had lost much of their bitterness but none of their virile strength, and his wiry six feet swung along with a new spring. For the morning paper confirmed Widsun's news. The remaining civilians in Jap hands were to come home via India. Not at once;

*Illustrated
by L. R.
Gustavson*



Sanchard struck the man across the face. . . . Mario grabbed the hat and scuttled out of sight.

but time no longer mattered, with the end in sight.

With his money safely banked against his wife's return, with a new hat and clean linen and a haircut, Mackay started uptown. Every time he caught his reflection in a window-glass, he felt like laughing. He was a hard-looking citizen, as a man who has fought through the jungle must be; but how different from yesterday!

MACKAY had timed his arrival to eleven sharp, as instructed.

Brazil Imports, Incorporated, was in a sleazy old neighborhood of down-at-heel rooming-houses on which occasional store-fronts had been tacked. Widsun's dingy shop was a palace alongside this unwashed exterior, whose windows veiled dusty heaps of coffee samples with identifying cards, apparently unchanged for years past.

The place was redolent of coffee; a boy was brushing up the floor, amid bulging sacks and shelves of samples. When Mackay asked for Mr. Sanchard; the boy pointed to a glassed office in the rear and went on sweeping.

Mackay walked in. A young woman was tapping at a typewriter. At an old rollopt desk sat Sanchard, a thin man

with spectacles in black rims. He had a hungry look. Under thirty, thought Mackay; he sat in shirtsleeves, dirty ones. His pasty features looked vaguely unwashed; his nails were badly in need of attention. He had a mop of bristly black hair above a long face, droopy nose, tight lips and a long chin. Not an aggressive type, but Mackay remembered the warning from Widsun.

Sanchard looked up at him, but spoke first to the secretary.

"Better get on to the bank, Miss Brown." His voice was dry and abrupt: "Well, sir?"

"I'm looking for Mr. Sanchard. My name's Elder."

"Sit down. One moment till I sign these letters; then I'll be at your service."

Sanchard perused, then scribbled signatures; the one glance at Mackay

had been biting. Miss Brown donned coat and hat, and departed. Sanchard straightened up and nodded to Mackay; he had, obviously, been waiting until they were alone. Seated beside the desk, Mackay took out the card from Herman Frick and laid it down. Sanchard looked at it and relaxed.

"Frick wired me you were coming. Why didn't you show up sooner?"

Conscious of almost hostile scrutiny and appraisal from the black eyes, Mackay smiled.

"I like to make haste slowly," he said cheerfully.

Sanchard removed the spectacles, laid them aside, and seemed pleased by this response.

"Things are a bit uncertain here," he observed. "Frick went into details with you about packing and stowage; well, I want no changes made in my territory. What you do after delivery

in Chicago, is your affair. Understood?"

"Quite right," said Mackay. So Mr. Elder was from Chicago, eh? No clue yet as to what it was all about.

"Trucks," went on Sanchard, "are safer, and rail shipments are hard to count on these days; even so, it's hard to find trucks. That's up to you. How much can you handle now?"

"Oh, whatever amount suits you," Mackay rejoined.

The black brows lifted in surprise. "Money no object, eh? Very well. Let me figure a minute on my stocks."

SANCHARD busied himself with pencil and paper. He had a very faint accent; if he were a Brazilian, he must have been in this country a long time. Presently he looked up.

"An even hundred bags. You'll need two five-ton trucks. Naturally, I can't guarantee the weight of each compressed blue-sage brick; I haven't opened the bags. But the average is always fair. That'll set you back fifty grand."

To Mackay, it was all Greek except the last sentence. Fifty grand!

"Do I buy sight unseen?" he ventured.

"In advance," snapped Sanchard. "What kind of a fool d'ye think I am? The bags stay in my shed until I have the cash. And no checks."

"Okay," said Mackay coolly. "I'll have to get the cash and see about the trucks; it'll take a trip downtown. The truck-drivers will have to carry invoices. Want me to get the bags today?"

"No. Noon is the safest time to do that, and be clear of the city. Have them here at noon tomorrow; I'll have the papers all ready. If you're free this evening, meet me for dinner and close the deal then."

"Okay. Say where and when."

Sanchard flipped him a book of matches.

"There's the place. . . . Say at eight o'clock. I own a share in the joint, so just ask for me when you get there. Would you care to look at the set-up here?"

"Yes, if it wouldn't be out of line."

Sanchard smiled faintly—the only sign of relaxation his tight-lipped face had shown. He rose, and nodded toward a rear door.

"No secrets here, if that's your meaning. Of course, until coffee stocks loosened and rationing ended, we were a bit pinched; even now we're limited on varieties and quantity. But you can get an idea why the business is safe, provided it's handled with intelligence."

They passed out into a low, long warehouse tightly shut up at the moment. There was not much to see. The place was simply packed with

bags of green coffee, each sack distinguished from the others only by its stenciled symbols. Sanchard read these marks with ease—Costa Rica, Brazil, Guatemala, grades and growths and minute differences. He warmed, under the spell of his own words; he revealed a shrewd, humorless, acid



wit, a flash here and another there of mordant penetration or unsuspected acuity. Mackay began to see the real man, then had a deeper glimpse.

Sanchard pointed to a large empty space, in passing.

"Your bags will go there, Elder. They'll arrive ten minutes before your trucks. Have them here on the minute, I warn you! I'll not have that stuff standing about here. It'll come from four other storage houses—"

He halted abruptly. Mackay followed his eyes to something hanging on a nail—a crushed hat, crushed and crusted and blackened with blood.

"Mario!" The word burst forth, almost like a scream, startling Mackay. In response a man came running, or

rather hobbling; a man with a twisted leg, a dwarfed little cripple with enormously wide shoulders.

Sanchard exploded at him in a strange tongue, possibly Portuguese, and in torrential fury. He struck the little man across the face, twice, in an almost hysteric loss of self-control. Mario grabbed the hat from the nail and scuttled away out of sight.

"Stupidity! It drives me crazy!" said Sanchard, ashamed of his outburst. Mackay made no comment. He understood, as though someone had whispered it, what all this meant. That hat had belonged to Sinclair, Widson's agent, who had been murdered only last night.

Back in the office, Mackay shook hands and departed briskly.

He returned to his hotel, in the torties, slid into a lobby chair, and sat staring blankly at nothing. He was committed to meeting Sanchard tonight and handing him fifty thousand dollars—for what? He had not the faintest idea. Something that was



Sanchard came to his feet. "Hello, Polly! I was hoping you'd be along.... You'll join us?"

smuggled, he could guess. Elder was a crook of some sort from Chicago, acting as a distributor of this "blue-sage," whatever that meant; it was hidden in bags of coffee.

Mackay knew he was up a stump. He could not communicate with Widsun. Unless prepared to go through with the fantastic deal, he would be worse than a fool to meet Sanchard that evening for dinner. His new job had ended up in the air. Taking out the match-book Sanchard had given him, he saw that it advertised a night-spot in the Seventies, Chez Piccolo.

"Dead end, sure enough!" he reflected. "Unless one of Widsun's men contacts me before tonight, the game's up, for certain! Let's see, now: Suppose Sanchard is handling contraband of some sort, and Widsun is out to highjack him—that might be it. Uh-huh, that looks like it. Sanchard is nobody's fool, either. He grows on you."

Quite true; Mr. Bartolomeo Sanchard had a deadly quality which im-

pressed itself on the consciousness. On the other hand, he was in a highly nervous condition. His outburst against Mario showed as much. Remembering the little cripple's face, Mackay reflected that Sanchard might have gone a step too far there; that face had held vicious hatred, under the blows. This nervous lack of self-control was the only apparent flaw in the armor of Sanchard.

Well, there was nothing to be done except wait, and so Mackay abandoned his reflections. He went into the hotel

café for a bite of lunch, sat for half an hour in the writing-room scribbling letters, then got his key and went up to his own room.

He opened the door and stepped in—to find Hiram Widsun sitting there, reading an early evening paper.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you were here!"

"Neither did anyone else." Widsun chuckled faintly. "I like this hotel. In fact, I own a piece of it, and I can find my way around with the help. Well sir, what luck?"

Mackay accepted one of those evil-looking but marvelous weeds, settled into a chair, and recounted his interview with the coffee broker. Widsun heard him in silence, with unchanged expression; but at mention of Mario and the hat, the pale blue eyes flashed.

When Mackay had finished, Mr. Widsun removed his derby and ran his stubby fingers through his shock of gray hair.

"Times have changed something cruel," he observed, with a shake of his head. "Just when I'm getting old and stiff in the joints, I got to go it alone, practically. My best man got took by his draft board this morning, and Mr. Sinclair gone yesterday."

"Did he die?" Mackay asked.

Widsun nodded.

"Yes sir; at two this morning. I didn't mean to throw you into this Sanchard affair so hasty. I figured that with all you knew about Chinese things, you'd be of use to me in other directions; but this thing broke, and here we are. Bart Sanchard is the worst sort of scoundrel: that's too good a name for him. He inherited his coffee business and has a finger in other things—too many things. And now you and me have to go it together, blast it!"

Mackay grinned. "You don't seem to like the prospect. Well, what's the contraband in the picture? Bricks of blue-sage, he called it."

Widsun bit at his cigar. He looked absent-minded and lost in thought.

"Yes, yes, blue-sage," he rejoined vaguely. "Bambalacha, mohasky, anything you want to call it. Look here!" His head lifted; his eyes came alive. "Blast it, that's the answer to everything! And to think I never guessed it!"

"What?" demanded Mackay, puzzled.

"Why, Mr. Sinclair's hat, of course!" The wheezy voice was suddenly vibrant. "Yes, that was his hat, no doubt of it. He didn't have none when he was picked up with his skull smashed in. Sanchard has got it; one of his men fetched it in there and hung it up. He don't dream it means anything—he lost his head when he saw it there. What happened to it?"

WIDSUN was fairly shaking with excitement.

"Mario grabbed it and ran."

"Sanchard wanted it out of there quick, eh? Lost his head—first time I ever heard of him losing his head! Well, we had it, and lost it." Widsun relaxed dejectedly. "The hat, I mean!"

"Does the hat mean anything to you?"

"It might mean everything."

"Evidence?"

"Lord, no, sir. Just a notion of mine." Widsun relapsed into abstraction. "So he struck Mario, huh? That crippled beggar hates him bad enough anyhow, but is worse scared of him. And I wouldn't go around there myself; I wouldn't dare. Or else I could arrange it with Mario. The poor devil would do anything for money."

"Well, if you want the hat, I'll get it for you," spoke up Mackay. "That is, if you can draw off Sanchard himself, or know when he'll be absent. I can leave a fake message for Sanchard, to satisfy the office girl. I don't suppose you want me to meet him tonight anyhow; that fifty thousand dollars gums things up."

"It don't gum nothing up." The pale blue eyes widened on Mackay.

"Blast it, of course you could do it! I could make sure Sanchard was gone from there—yes, that's easy to fix. It means takin' chances, naturally—"

Suddenly Widsun jammed the derby on his head, shot out of his chair, darted to the door, and paused.

"Set right here! I'll call you back quick as I fix it, sir. But mind, whatever time I set, you be there prompt to the minute! And look out for Mario; he's high all the time."

He jerked the door open and was gone.

Mackay stared, then relaxed in his chair, smiling. His amusement passed into bewildered reflection. Blue-sage—mohasky—bambalacha! What the devil! Mr. Widsun's vocabulary was over his head. And the crippled Mario was *high*—what on earth did that mean?

Out of it all he could sift plenty of sense. Widsun could arrange to get Sanchard pulled out of the way. The thing was to get hold of that hat, on the gamble that it might be Sinclair's hat, and the further gamble that it would somehow prove of value. An unlikely bet, reflected Mackay; everything was unlikely. A more cockeyed set-up he had never seen. But with Sanchard gone, he was confident that he could get hold of the hat, if it still existed. Ten to one, Sanchard had ordered it burned or destroyed.

"Mine not to reason why, mine but to do or die!" he murmured cheerfully. "The poor old duffer has left me more up in the air than ever. Blue-sage is what? And he surely doesn't expect me to keep that fifty-thousand-dollar appointment tonight. But the cripple hates Sanchard; that's helpful. And he'd do anything for money; still better. The hat's as good as in the bag right now. Only, I'd sure like to know why!"

He found himself back where he started—the peculiar, to say the least, appearance of Widsun here in his room. So he owned an interest in this hotel! The secondhand business must be prosperous. Suddenly Mackay sat up, remembering Lou Banxter, whom he had known well in other days.

A LONG-RETIRED sports writer, Banxter at last hearing was spending his declining years in the comfort of a cozy Lexington Avenue bar. He was said to have more friends in the city, and a more extensive knowledge of its back alleys and side streets, than any man alive. Why not tackle him for information? Mackay reached for the phone book and turned the pages. Yes, there it was—Lou Banxter.

The phone buzzed sharply, startling him. He scooped it up and replied.

"This is me, sir," came Widsun's voice. "The fix is all made, I'm glad

to say. It's for three-thirty; you got plenty of time. You get there prompt, and you can count on ten or fifteen minutes—no more."

"All right," said Mackay. "There's a couple of things I want to know—"

A click; Widsun had hung up. Mackay followed suit, angrily.

"All right, then, I'll go ask Lou Banxter!" he exclaimed.

After buying a new hat that morning, he had brought the old one back in a bag. He now took it from the bag, folded the bag neatly, and pockeered it. A glance at his watch, and he was on his way.

HE took a taxi to Banxter's bar, and entered. The proprietor sat dozing in lordly majesty, his desk surrounded by inscribed and framed photographs of the great and near-great. He wakened to Mackay's name; recollection woke within him, and he pumped his visitor's hand.

"Tom Mackay—well, well, well, well! Heard you were lost in China—never thought to see you again. What'll it be? A beer? Tut-tut! As you like—"

"I really stopped for information," said Mackay, after they had talked for a bit. "You know everything. Ever hear of a coffee broker here named Sanchard?"

Lou Banxter fished in his aged but nimble brain and came up empty-handed.

"Blank. Absolutely blank," he said.

"Then what about a man I'm associated with at the moment—a secondhand dealer down on the Battery, or rather Front Street, named Hiram Widsun?"

"Ah! Now we can oblige," said the other. "Let's see; the name's familiar. A queer little runt with an empty face—yeah. I got it. He's nuts."

"Nuts?"

"Nuts. Screwy. Cockeyed. Fixed idea, you know! Helps his friends. If you're a crook and stick some poor devil he knows, he'll go after you to the limit. Jake the Shine put away some guy, and his widow hollered to Widsun, and Jake's in Sing Sing now. A big shot in Albany was back of some snow-pushers here—you know, morphia. A fat racket! Somebody Widsun knew got hooked, and be damned if he didn't go after the whole racket tooth and nail! He's that sort. And no rules neither, from what I've heard. But he must be pretty old now."

"Well heeled, apparently."

"I wouldn't know. I've heard some funny ones on this guy, too. They say he's got a reach that would surprise you; nobody in the country he can't get to. A lot of New York guys claim that, and most are phonies, but not this one. If you're working with



With a scream of fury, Sanchard leaped into action; at this, all hell broke loose.

him, you tie up close and stick; that's my advice."

Mackay listened to rambling stories until his time was up, but got no more details. He departed at length, promising to look in soon again, and headed for his destination somewhat thoughtfully, disturbed only by the recollection that he had forgotten to ask Lou Banxter what was meant by blue-sage.

This information threw a new light on Widsun; rather, it lent the man a bit of background and a faint tinge of romance. Perhaps, in this cynical city, a man who went all out to help a friend might be called screwy. More likely Hiram Widsun had accumu-



lated such a reputation by degrees, for eccentric he certainly was.

At three-thirty to the minute Mackay walked into the Brazil Imports store, and went straight back to the office. Miss Brown was there, and he tipped his hat to her blithely.

"Mr. Sanchard around?"

"I'm sorry, but he was called out. He may be back any minute, though."

"I'll leave a note for him, then."

He got paper and pencil, and scrawled a brief note to Sanchard:

Trucks will be here at twelve-thirty instead of twelve

T. L. Elder.

He folded the note

"Come to think of it, I'd better leave this with Mario," he said. "Is he out back?"

"Yes, I think so."

With a cheerful nod he made his way into the rear shed. Apparently his move caused Miss Brown no qualms, and he remembered the boast of Sanchard that this place had no secrets. He called the name of Mario, and the little man came hobbling into sight.

"You remember me?" said Mackay. "I was here this morning with Mr. Sanchard."

At the other's nod, he relaxed. His one fear had been that Mario might speak no English. He extended the

note, and folded with it was a ten-spot.

"Please give this note to Mr. Sanchard when he comes back."

Mario took the message. His eyes flashed at the money, then swept up at Mackay in keen questioning. Mackay smiled.

"There's another one like that for you, if you care to earn it. What became of the hat Mr. Sanchard had a fit about—Mr. Sinclair's hat?"

Across the intelligent features flitted swift emotions: suspicion, fear, sharp doubt, temptation. Then Mario said, grinning

"That hat I found in the street. In the trash-barrel. He said to burn it. I

thought it would give him a bad turn to see it hanging here! So it did, too."

Mackay handed him the paper bag, still folded.

"Here; put it in this and bring it to me, and move sharp! It means another ten-spot."

The cripple caught at the bag, an impish glee in his face.

"Okay, Mister," he chirped. "It'll serve him right for hitting me, the big bum!"

HE scurried away. Mackay waited; he need not have worried about the man's knowing English. Presently Mario reappeared, holding the unfolded bag. He held it open to show the flattened, blood-caked hat within, and thrust it at Mackay.

"Here y'are. Don't tell him, or he'll kill me," he babbled. He took the banknote handed him and slipped it out of sight. "Thanks, Mister. You're a good guy. I always liked the Bruno kid; I didn't have nothing to do with it."

Mackay nodded, smiled, and walked out.

As he passed the office, he stuck in his head and told Miss Brown that Mario had the note, and then went on. The pasty-faced boy, who was ineffectually dusting the piles of coffee samples, gawked at him. Outside, the street was clear. Mackay had left his taxi at the corner. He regained it, got in, and was on his way back to the hotel.

He looked once at his loot; it was a gruesome object, mashed flat and covered with caked blood. Why had Mario mentioned the Bruno kid? No telling; just one more of the loose ends everywhere.

Suddenly Mackay leaned forward, slid the dividing glass away, and addressed his driver.

"Say, a friend of mine was using a lot of slang talk and I didn't savvy it at all. What did he mean by blue-sage and bambalacha?"

The driver gave him a quick glance. "I guess your friend was high, Mister. You know—goof-butts, mooca, Indian hay, reefers!"

Light burst upon Mackay. "Oh! You mean marihuana!"

"You said it, Mister."
Marihuana!

The most common yet most mysterious of modern drugs, whose use had swept the entire country as a result of the war, replacing the opium and heroin and morphia which Jap sources could no longer supply. Most ancient of narcotics, used by Persians and Arabs before the Crusades, yet most modern as well, since it could be grown in any back yard. Responsible for jitterbugs and hot jazz and bloody crimes and hashish dreams, its effects little known with any accuracy, too

cheap to attract the big-time rackets, peddled in cigarette form everywhere, marihuana had become the widespread vice of the underworld almost before repressive agencies had wakened to its terrific effects.

Seated in his room, Mackay eyed the situation soberly, aware now of its implications. Whether or not Sanchard imported compressed cakes of the drug hidden in coffee sacks from Brazil, he was certainly acting as distributor here; and Mr. Elder had been sent up from New Orleans to take over the Chicago territory. So much was clear; the reason stood revealed for the excessive precautions taken by Sanchard.

"The Bruno kid"—what did that mean?

A tap sounded at the door. Mackay opened it, and Mr. Widsun came in to the room, breathing hard. Mackay gave him a somber look.

"Well sir, did you get it?"

"Yes," said Mackay. "And some information to boot. I didn't realize the sort of thing I was in for. Sit down and come clean. I don't like the smell of this business, any of it. If you think I'm going to be a party to any narcotics highjacking, guess again. Marihuana, that's what it is, and I'm not having any."

Widsun dropped into a chair, pushed back his derby, and stared at Mackay. He looked shocked and dismayed.

"Why, Mr. Mackay, I thought you understood!"

"I do now, anyhow. Are you using me to help you rob Sanchard of a big marihuana stock? I said I wasn't particular; that's true. But I'll be damned if I'll dirty myself with drugs and narcotics! I suppose that second-hand joint of yours is a good safe front for such work, and there's probably big money in it—"

"Hold on, sir! Blast it all, gimme a chance!" broke out Widsun in agitation. He brought out a handkerchief and mopped his face. "Jumping at conclusions don't win no medals, as old Cap'n Trunnion used to say. First, take a look at this."

Fumbling at an inside pocket, he drew forth a folded newspaper clipping and opened it to show a portrait. Mackay took it; his eye was caught by the name of Pietro Bruno, and by the picture of a wide-eyed, handsome boy of fifteen.

"The Bruno kid," he murmured.

"That's him, sir. Where'd you hear of him?"

"Mario mentioned him. Said he had nothing to do with it, whatever that meant."

"He was a good boy. He worked in my store," said Widsun earnestly. "Helped to support his mother and sisters, he did; his father was killed

on a torpedoed ship. When they pulled him out of the river, the papers ran that picture. What had happened to him?"

He paused to bite at a cigar. Mackay looked at the boy's fine face, and the feeling grew upon him that he had made a mistake, a bad one. The wheezy voice went on.

"Smokin' reefers, that's what. They had made a hop-head out of him. I ran it down to a pusher named Williams; a pusher is what they call the dope-peddler. Nailing him was easy. He's behind the bars now; but I wanted the man on top. They warned me to lay off and things got hot. If I can link Sanchard to Williams, then I've got him cold."

"And can you?"

"Sinclair claimed he could, but they got him first. He had been stripped of all except my card. When you spoke about that hat, it give me a notion. I aint in this for myself, Mr. Mackay. I promised that kid's mother I'd get the man responsible, and so help me I will!"

"I'm sorry I went off at half-cock," said Mackay. He remembered the things Lou Banxter had told him about this queer little man. He met the pale blue eyes and put out his hand. "Shake. Forgive me, Widsun."

Widsun seized his hand and gripped it hard for an instant. The blue eyes warmed; into the gaunt features flashed a momentary emotion, a startling depth of feeling.

"Why, God bless you, sir, I'm glad you spoke your mind—I am that! Nothing like having an honest understanding, is my notion. Now let's have a look at that hat. I remember how poor Mr. Sinclair used to set and play with it. So Mario mentioned the Bruno kid, huh? Then he knew there was a connection. He's heard 'em talking. Blast it, all I want is to link that clever rat up with Williams, and I've got him hooked!"

He took the bag that Mackay produced, and gingerly drew out the grisly object.

"I suppose you're thinking about fingerprints?" Mackay asked.

"No, sir, this aint a storybook; marihuana crooks are the smartest outfit going. Sanchard, he's a regular steel trap, he is!"

WIDSUN eyed the battered head-gear dismally. He plucked at the caked blood; he turned the thing over and over in his hands, even pulling out the hatband and peering inside it. With an asthmatic sigh, he shook his head.

"No soap."

"Well, you could catch him tomorrow with the stuff in his shed," suggested Mackay. "That is, if we put over any deal with him. He'll have

the stuff there, for a few minutes only, but that's plenty long enough."

Widsun shook his head gloomily.

"You don't know him like I do. He's covered from any angle; he'd wriggle out of it sure. And possession is only a misdemeanor. He keeps his stuff in half a dozen different warehouses. No, we got to link him up with Williams the pusher! And there's only one way to break him—throw him off balance! He's nervous right now. He found Mr. Sinclair was on to him, and had Sinclair killed. This has fair got under his skin. Now would be the right time, if only—"

His voice trailed away. Suddenly he caught his breath.

"Look there!" He jerked up the hat and pointed to the leather band. "My eyes aint what they used to be—you look! What is it, just there?"

MACKAY looked. He switched on the bed-lamp and held the hat close to the light. The smooth leather showed markings.

"Scratches, all right, and letters," he said. "As if they had been scratched with a pin or a knife-point. . . . Wait, there's a name! *Mary Werner—jilt*—no, it's *jilted*—will talk. . . . Now the blood is over it." With a fingernail he flicked off the caked blood and cleared the surface of the leather. "*I G. . . that's all. Mary Werner jilted will talk I G. That's it. For a thousand bucks, I suppose, she'll talk. Who's the dame?*"

"Never heard of her. Blast it, I was right! I had a hunch about this hat! Now lemme think a minute."

Widsun closed his eyes and sat motionless as a graven image. Then, eyes still closed, he began to speak disconnectedly as though thinking aloud.

"*Chez Piccolo*; that's a little night-spot. Mr. Sinclair hung around there a lot. *Piccolo* is slang for juke-box. Sanchard owns a piece of the joint. Huh! Most likely they got a tea-pad somewhere around the place; that means a room for blue-sage smokers. Mr. Sinclair suspected they were on to him, and he scratched that message inside his hat—"

Presently his eyes flew open and he looked fixedly at Mackay.

"Well, sir, we got the answer, if we can only find what it means. *Jilted!* That's a good old-fashioned word; aint used much these days. Means just what it says—jilted. But we've got to learn who this Mary Werner is. Some woman works around that *Chez Piccolo* place, I expect. Who jilted her?"

"Sanchard, most likely," suggested Mackay. "Or is he married?"

"Oh, sure. But he's one of the kind where marriage don't signify. There's

circles around this town, Mr. Mackay, where marriage is no more'n a name, and a bad name at that. Maybe you can get some line on this Mary Werner tonight. It'll have to be tonight. I got a feeling like the whole works are going to bust loose any minute. We got to work fast."

"Tonight? Me?" Tom Mackay exclaimed. "But that's out! It'd cost fifty grand to sit in that game with Sanchard. Unless you want me to bluff him—tell him I'll hand over the money in the morning."

Widsun shook his head.

"No sir. You don't never want to bluff that kind of man."

"Well, I don't suppose you want me to buy his marihuana for you?" Mackay asked whimsically.

"I got no use for it. We'd never trip him up that way, neither; he's too smart. The only way a man aint too smart is with a woman. Yes sir! If we find that woman, we got him; because she'll talk," Widsun said with conviction. "She'll talk for injured pride, for hate, for money, and for natural causes. Once you get a woman wound up tight, she's like a phonograph. All you got to do is touch the right spring, and off she goes."

Mackay smiled. "Well, Sinclair must have contacted this Mary Werner. We can take that for granted."

"Yes sir." The pale blue eyes firmed, scintillated, broke into a glow. "I got it. We'll gamble with Mr. Sanchard. State narcotic squads and Gov'ment men are all trying hard to put down the marihuana evil; yes sir, we'll gamble!"

"How?"

"Never mind; I aint sure yet, myself," said Widsun cheerfully. "But your job is to locate that Mary Werner and make sure of her! And whatever happens tonight, set tight. Trust in the Lord, as old Cap'n Trunnion used to say, but don't lose your head!"

So saying, Widsun fumbled in an inside pocket and dragged out a neat leather wallet and a huge roll of bills. He wet his thumb and counted off bills, shoved the pile at Mackay, and replaced the balance.

"There's a thousand dollars, sir. Put it in an envelope and use it if you find Mary Werner, and do it fast. She'll be scared, thinking Sinclair's dead. You tell her he aint dead. There's some reason back of her being willing to talk, and we got to learn it."

"Aren't you leaving things rather vague?"

"Blast it, I got to, sir! In this game you got to confuse the other fellow, move roundabout ways, do what aint expected! Sanchard is protected and ready against any attack; but if we can throw him off balance, we got him! The unusual, that's it."

"You spoke of a gamble—"

"Whatever happens, you keep your head," came the warning. "Mind, we don't want Sanchard killed; that'd spoil everything. We want to land him up the river."

"Okay, then," Mackay said resignedly. "Then I'm to meet him as planned?"

Widsun nodded abstractedly. He was tapping the leather wallet on his knee; it was a shiny, brand-new wallet, and a handsome one. Suddenly he rose, and shoved it at Mackay.

"Well, I got to be off. Here y'are, sir: all nice new bills. Give Sanchard the wallet and all. I'll take along Mr. Sinclair's hat, if you don't mind. It might come in handy. I'll be seeing you."

Mackay looked into the wallet, puzzled. He was absolutely stupefied by the sight of thousand-dollar bills. Before he could find tongue, Hiram Widsun picked up the blood-caked hat, popped it into the paper bag, and walked out of the room.

Fifty of them! Tom Mackay had never seen a thousand-dollar bill before in his life. Now he sat staring dazedly at the fortune in his hand. The thing was simply impossible to credit. This was not stage money; the bills were real. The brand-new wallet bore in gold letters the name of *Thomas L. Elder*. Also, it contained several identification-cards belonging to Elder.

Mackay started. The real Elder, Widsun had said grimly, would not reappear until Judgment Day. Then the Chicago narcotics-handler must have fallen a victim, like Sinclair, in this queer underground war. These cards had belonged to him; probably the new wallet had belonged to him, also.

Replacing the cards, Mackay looked again at the money. Not a lure, not bait, but real money to be handed over to Sanchard—fifty thousand dollars! Did this man Widsun own the mint? He seemed to handle huge sums like old rags. And all for what? The smiling face of a boy who had gone to the bad.

"I guess Lou Banxter knew what he was talking about," murmured Mackay. "By all accepted conventional standards, the man is nuts. Or else—or else I'm nuts myself."

Either one, he began to think, was quite possible. He pinched himself hard, winced, and decided that anyhow he was wide awake.

TOM MACKAY went to his dinner appointment a full half-hour too early. He did this purposely.

The *Chez Piccolo*, so far as externals went, made no appeal to the deluxe trade, and its glamour was nil. It appeared to be no more than the

converted basement of a brownstone front, and Mackay entered with some disappointment. If he were to make a fifty-thousand-dollar cash deal, he wanted to do it under bright lights and music!

ONCE inside, things looked different. The front room was a well-attended bar with a floor for dancing, or rather shagging, and a juke-box blaring away. Behind this was a passage, with a hat-check girl's cubby-hole, that opened into a dining-room of surprising size and pleasant appointments, though from the front it could be barely glimpsed. Here in the bar was the usual "discreet" lighting of a cocktail lounge; that is to say, the place was almost in darkness.

Mackay worked his way through the noise and obscurity toward the rear passage. He gained it, and caught sight of the hat-check girl in her niche. She was an attractive brunette; her dark eyes were alive with intelligence and energy. A few hats and wraps denoted that the dining-room was busy but by no means thronged.

"Dinner, sir?"

At his side, sprung from nowhere, Mackay found a sleek Tuxedo-clad figure whose sharp eyes probed him. "Are you the captain?" he asked.

The other laughed. "Yes sir. Captain and head-waiter and manager. Pretty soon I'll be dishwasher and cook as well, by the looks of things."

"I'm expecting to dine here with a friend, Mr. Sanchard. Do you know him?"

Instantly the man changed front; he became respectful, even obsequious.

"Yes, indeed, sir! He's not here yet; he usually drops in about eight. May I give you a seat at his table?"

"No, thanks." Mackay was conscious that the name of Sanchard had carried. The hat-check girl was eying him curiously. "I'll make myself comfortable at the bar and watch the crowd till he shows up." He turned to the girl and put his hat on the rail in front of her. "Have you any cigarettes?"

She lifted a tray of cigarettes to the rail. The sleek head-waiter, after one glance, was heading for the rear of the dining-room. Mackay met the indifferent eyes of the girl; their indifference, indeed, was quite odd, because it was out of character. He realized that she was taking no chances with any friend of Bartolomeo Sanchard.

"Can you tell me where I'll find a Miss Werner here?" he asked quietly. "Mary Werner?"

Her face did not change, but her eyes struck at him like a blow.

"What do you want with her?"

"Sorry," Mackay smiled. "I have a message for her, from a Mr. Sinclair."

The blood ebbed from her cheeks, leaving the rouge in a vermilion patch on dead white. She caught her breath slightly. Her eyes flicked about, and came back to him.

"I'm Mary Werner," she said, almost in a whisper. "I don't know any such man."

"Cheer up," said Mackay lightly, and picked up a pack of smokes. "He's not dead; that was all part of the game. Slide this out of sight; it'll prove what I say."

He had decided instantly to gamble everything. He laid down the envelope into which he had put the money from Widsun. She started; then her hand covered it and whisked it from sight.

"Beat it," she murmured. "I'll let you know later."

Mackay turned back to the bar, gained it, and ordered a drink. Had he won or lost? No telling. Was she really Mary Werner? He believed so; her eyes had betrayed her.

So Sanchard showed up at about eight, usually—that must mean nearly every evening. And he had an investment in the place. Sinclair must have been good at his work, if he had managed to contact this girl despite the danger around. Was there a back room for smokers—a "tea-pad?" Mackay neither knew nor cared to look.

As he waited, sipping his drink, doubts grew upon him. He had acted impulsively with the girl; perhaps she had tricked him. He did not like the looks of those in the bar; men and women alike, they struck him as too much of a kind, and a kind he did not fancy. Marihuana addicts or "vipers," he had heard somewhere, were never lushers; but here drinks were flowing fast. Perhaps the place drew all manner of underworld clients; perhaps it was his imagination and nothing else. . . .

Sanchard came in, spectacles and all.

The bartender spoke to him; one or two others nodded to him; he must have seen Mackay on entering, for he came straight to him, with a hearty word.

"Hello! Sorry I missed you this afternoon. I got your message; you needn't have bothered coming around with it."

"No trouble at all. Have a drink?"

"Thanks; I never touch it. Come along and get settled, and have a fresh one." Sanchard paused, handing the hat-check girl his hat and a small square package. "Evening, Mary," he greeted her briskly. "Careful of that box, if you please; it's cigars. Don't drop it."

She made some pert rejoinder, with her mechanical smile. Sanchard re-

moved and pocketed his spectacles and nodded to the scurrying captain, who preceded them to a table in a rear alcove and effusively summoned a waiter.

As Sanchard seated himself, the captain leaned over and spoke softly at his ear.

"Let 'em wait," said Sanchard. "Not much business tonight, eh, Frank?"

"Nothing to complain about, sir," replied the sleek captain. "Will there be any more in your party?"

"Later, perhaps. We'll go ahead and eat; I'm hungry. Bring Mr. Elder another drink. How about a nice thick steak, Elder?"

"Sounds like heaven," said Mackay, smiling. He found his host cordial, even affable.

Twice Sanchard nodded to men at other tables; two men and an overdressed woman were brought to a second table in the alcove, and one of the men shook hands briefly with Sanchard. Evidently the coffee broker was thoroughly at home here. He talked briskly with Mackay of the war, of politics, his black eyes flitting expectantly about the place. Expecting what?

The steaks came, and they were superb. The woman at the adjoining table disappeared and did not return; the two men remained. Suddenly Mackay saw the face of his host light up; an eager glow came into the dark eyes. A woman was drifting down the room, approaching them. She was young, blonde, richly gowned and furred; a petulant face, but in its way beautiful.

Sanchard came to his feet, and Mackay followed suit as Sanchard said:

"Hello, Polly! I was hoping you'd be along. . . . Miss Lavalley, this is Mr. Elder, a friend from out of town. You'll join us?"

She acknowledged the introduction indifferently, and shook her head.

"Sorry, Bart; can't even stay for a drink. I just dropped in for a moment. I've got a taxi waiting—"

SANCHARD excused himself to Mackay and accompanied her to the door, talking earnestly. Mackay sat down again. All these details were significant; he was getting a look behind the scenes into the activities of the real Sanchard. Yet he could not say what it all meant. He had the sensation of watching sub-surface activities at work, as though he were watching some smooth mechanism function, but he could not comprehend its aim.

He took out the spanking new bill-fold and laid it beside the plate of Sanchard. Then he remembered that Elder's identification-cards were still in it. No matter; perhaps Widsun had had some reason for putting them there. Besides, Sanchard was return-

ing now, alone, looking quite pleased with himself. He dropped into his chair, saw the wallet and picked it up.

"What's this?"

Mackay smiled. "A present for you. A memento of the occasion. The bills fitted in there so neatly it was a shame to disturb 'em."

Sanchard opened the wallet, glanced at the bills, and made no comment.

"Quite an idea; a neat bit of leather! Thanks." He pocketed the wallet. At this moment Frank approached and handed him a note. "For me?"

He unfolded the paper, read it, and his face darkened under an angry rush of blood. He tore the note to shreds.

"Tell her to go to hell! She's all through here. Call the concession people at once and tell them to replace her tomorrow with another girl," he snapped.

Mackay followed his furious glance and saw Mary Werner, cigarette-tray in hand, watching them from across the room. She turned away. Sanchard picked up knife and fork and resumed his meal, master of himself once more.

"Have any trouble locating your trucks?" he asked calmly.

Mackay shook his head. "None to mention."

Little things impressed him, bulk- ing oddly large. Sanchard had not used his spectacles since arriving; he had no need of them. A bluff, per- haps to change his appearance. . . . Mary Werner had sent that note after the dizzy blonde came in. The word "jilted" needed no further explana- tion. That phase of things was cleared up.

Frank was now bringing two men to a side table against the wall. Now he left them and came over to Sanch- ard, saying nothing, but with an odd expression in his sleek face. Sanchard exchanged a look with him.

"Oh, you think so? Well, keep an eye on them," he said.

"What's wrong?" Mackay demanded, as the captain moved off.

Sanchard frowned. "Hard to say; there's a queer feel in the air. Frank's nervous. I've had trouble lately with a little rat who's trying to cut into the business; a man named Widsun, who's off in the head. It'd be funny, if it wasn't for that. You never can tell about a guy who's cracked in the up- per story."

Mackay agreed sympathetically.

Inwardly, he was tempted to feel much the same way about Hiram Widsun. The amazing way in which the man juggled money was simply not sane. This fifty thousand dollars handed to Sanchard for no reason at all, was sheer fantastic madness. He himself, in the rôle of Elder, was doing nothing to justify the enormous retainer given him.

Widsun had his shrewd moments, true, but so had any madman. To hand over this money and not adopt the obvious course of catching Sanch- ard with the narcotics in his shed, was sheer folly. Widsun's excuse for not doing this was weak and unconvinc- ing, though at the moment it had sounded plausible. Taken all in all, it began to look very much as if the man were a futile theorist.



Mackay had his man now. was finishing him, when — crash!

"Well, keep him in the kitchen. Don't let him in here. I'll come out presently."

Frank departed. Mackay wondered uneasily why the cripple was here. "High?" That meant, he could now guess, that Mario was under the drug's influence, and therefore quite ir- responsible. The effect of marihuana was far from that of alcohol. It re- moved all inhibitions, but it also re- moved all sense of time and space; it left the addict unable to concentrate upon anything for days afterward, while clear enough in the head.

Suddenly Mackay was aware of electric tension in the place. There was a queer silence. Sanchard had lifted his head and was staring at something, open-mouthed. Mackay turned, followed the man's gaze.

WALKING down the room and heading straight for their table was Hiram Widsun, derby and all.

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered Sanchard, staring. "Here's the rat now!"

Widsun removed his derby as he approached; under one arm he held a flat package. That he was known and recognized here, was obvious. The bartender appeared from the front room, staring after him; Mary Werner was also standing at startled gaze; the sleek captain, Frank, was coming across the room at a lope.

And yet, somehow, Mackay could not accept this conclusion. His heart told him what his reason denied: that this queer, uncouth little man pos- sessed a deep warmth of human sym- pathy, a propulsion from strange inner forces beyond ordinary compre- hension, a standard of values at vari- ance with those of the world around. Grotesque, helpless, apologetic he might be, but futile he assuredly was not, nor touched in the head.

The two men who had last come in held the interest of Sanchard, who kept darting frowning glances at them, for no obvious reason.

"They seem to worry you," com- mented Mackay lightly.

Sanchard grunted. "Frank can smell a dick a mile away. They may be State narcotic-squad men. If so, they're wasting their time here. . . . Hello— now what?"

The sleek captain came loping briskly from the rear of the place. He leaned over the table with inaudible words.

Sanchard frowned. "Mario? What the devil does he want here?"

"He wouldn't say, sir. Said he had to see you at once. He's high, of course."

But the two men at the wall table shoved back their chairs and gazed out upon the room with genial and comprehensive interest.

Widsun came to the table and halted, bobbing his head at Sanchard.

"Evening, sir," he said in his apologetic way. "If you aint too busy, could I have a bit of talk with you?"

"Why, sure!" said Sanchard. "Frank! A chair for Mr. Widsun!"

THE sleek captain complied, beam- ing; relaxation was evident on all sides. Widsun seated himself carefully and put his derby and flat package beside him. Mackay eyed that package sharply; it had a familiar look.

"This gentleman," said Sanchard, indicating Mackay, "will sit in, if you don't mind."

"Lord bless you, sir, and why would I mind?" Widsun rejoined wheezily. "There's nothing like having a friend on hand when you got business to transact, is my notion."

Sanchard eyed his visitor in sardonic anticipation, and flung Mackay a word, in open contempt.

"This is going to be good! Well, Mr. Widsun, what business have you with me?"

The pale blue eyes regarded him earnestly; the hollow features held no expression whatever. Widsun produced a cigar and bit at it; the hovering Frank swooped and held a match. Then, at a gesture from Sanchard, Frank made himself scarce.

"I'd like to get our accounts squared up a bit, sir," said Widsun. "I got two or three bones to pick, as the saying goes, but I don't want to have any trouble. I'm getting on in years, and my stummick bothers me quite a lot, and I thought it might be a good idea to speak to you man to man and straighten things out."

Sanchard chuckled. "Quite right, quite right!" he said heartily, giving Mackay a glance of keen amusement. "And just what do you want out of me? How much?"

"Oh, not a cent, Mr. Sanchard! Not a red cent!" replied Widsun protestingly. "But about Mrs. Bruno, now. She's a widow woman, and—"

Sanchard lost his amused look.

"Now, listen to me, you old fool," he snapped angrily, transfixing Widsun with his black hot stare. "For the last time, *no!* I never heard of the woman or her boy in my life. I certainly had no connection with what happened to him. I'm in no way responsible. So let that end your nonsense. You can't blackmail me for any fantastic sum on that account."

"Yes sir," said Widsun meekly. "If that's the way you look at it, I'll have no more to say. I just thought you'd like to ease things a bit for her—"

"Not a cent," snapped Sanchard. "Get that crazy notion out of your head, once and for all!"

Widsun sighed. "All right, sir, just as you say. But I've got our accounts all made up to date, if you'd be good enough to run your eye over 'em."

Sanchard laughed shortly. "Accounts?"

"Yes sir."

"Let's see them, then," said Sanchard with a tolerant air, and winked at Mackay.

Widsun fished in his pocket and brought forth the little black notebook in which Mackay had seen him writing at their first encounter. He flipped over the leaves and then extended it to Sanchard.

"Here we are, sir. I think I've got everything down."

Smiling, the coffee broker took the little book and began to peruse the entries. His smile became a mechanical grimace, and then died. A startled expression came into his face. He turned over a page. A rush of blood suffused and darkened his features; passionate anger took hold of him. With an oath, he slammed the notebook down, and glared at Widsun.

"You crazy old lunatic, you ought to be locked up!" he cried furiously. "Clear out! Get out of here or I'll have you thrown out—quick about it!"

Calmly puffing at his cigar, Widsun retrieved the little notebook. He shook his head sorrowfully.

"Blast it, I was afraid of that!" he murmured. He reached out as though to pick up his derby, then caught at the package. "Oh, I near forgot. Have a look at this, Mr. Sanchard—"

"Be damned to you! Get out!" cried Sanchard, in a passion.

Instead, Widsun slid from the paper a flattened, blood-caked object and laid it on the table. It was Sinclair's hat.

"There it is, sir," he said. "You'd be surprised at the things that hat has already told me! Yes sir, you'd be surprised. I expect you recognize it."

Sanchard gulped. His gaze dilated on the hat as though in complete fascination. He gulped again, the dark flush draining out of his face.

"Where—where did you—" he began, and checked himself.

"That's right, sir, don't you give nothing away," Widsun said cheerfully. "You didn't have a thing to do with Mr. Sinclair's death; that's your story, and you stick to it. You can't be sent up for what you didn't do. And possession of marihuana don't signify; that's only a misdemeanor, not a felony."

Sanchard turned to him.

"Get out, I say! I've had enough of your crazy talk! I'll have you thrown out—"

"No sir, it can't be done."

Widsun reached for his old derby and jammed it on his head. As though this had been a signal, the two men at the wall-table left their chairs and started across the room. Frank was already on his way, with a contingent of waiters, but the two men reached the table first. A flick of coat lapels, a glint of badges, and the sleek captain and his waiters came to abrupt halt.

"What's the meaning of this?" rasped Sanchard, looking up at the two. "What d'you want?"

It was Hiram Widsun who made response. He seemed quite unfurried.

"Why, these gents are Treasury agents, and they're looking for a man named Tom Elder, who took part in a Federal Reserve Bank robbery in Chicago, awhile back."

Mackay jumped, as the words hit him; and Sanchard leaped to his feet.

"Elder!" he cried. "Elder!"

"Yes sir," said Widsun. "That's your alias, aint it?"

"My alias? You lunatic, *there's* Tom Elder!" Sanchard pointed at Mackay. "Everybody here knows me, you old fool—"

"And I know that gent," broke in Widsun. "Mackay, his name is. He's a friend of mine."

At this juncture the two Treasury agents—if such they were—took charge and did it fast. Frank and his waiters were shooed off; Mackay was frisked and nothing found; Sanchard was frisked, and while no weapon came to light, the wallet with Elder's name was produced.

"It's probably got some of them stolen banknotes inside," said Widsun sagely. "You can tell by the numbers later on."

"We can tell right now," said one of the two agents, dipping into the wallet. "Yep! You'll have to step along with us, Mr. Sanchard, alias Elder. And no tricks! We've got two men in the bar and four more outside in a car. If you want trouble, you can have it."

Sanchard, torn between astonished dismay and bewildered fury, erupted.

"It's a frame-up!" he cried. "You can't do this to me. Anybody knows who I am—I can prove it in no time—"

WIDSUN rose, walked across the floor and began to talk with Mary Werner. Sanchard, whirling on Mackay, cursed him with bitter fury and growing excitement. Mackay grinned and said nothing.

The dining-room was rapidly emptying of patrons. Frank and the waiters stood clumped at the front. Two more men came shoving through, advancing on the group in the rear and exchanging greetings with the two agents. Sanchard turned his wrath upon them, just as Widsun and Mary Werner approached.

"Federal men or not, you can't get away with this!" stormed Sanchard. "I'll have the lot of you jailed for false arrest. It's a frame!"

"Who said we were Federal men?" retorted one of the four. "Nothing of the sort, Sanchard. We're from the State narcotics bureau. Lamp this." He displayed his badge at length. "You're under arrest."

"Narcotics? Arrest?" And Sanchard looked from face to face.

Widsun came up. "One of you boys grab that package in the cloak-room," he said, and one of the men moved off. "No use, Mr. Sanchard. You're hooked proper. Miss Werner, you're sure about him?"

"Dead sure," replied the hat-check girl. It was her moment, and she made the most of it, giving Sanchard look for look. "He brings the stuff in here to me, and I split it up in a dozen packages that his pushers take out. Williams was one of them. So what, Mr. Sanchard? You don't need to grind your teeth at me! You had your chance, and turned it down for your blowsy blonde—"

With one hoarse scream of fury, Sanchard leaped into action.

He sent the table over with a splintering crash of dishes, and hurdled it in pantherish ferocity. He struck the girl aside. A carafe in his hand felled Widsun like a log; then he was gone, darting from the alcove, turning for the kitchen entry. Of them all, Mackay was the only one who had noted the gathering storm. He slid aside as the table went over, and darted after Sanchard.

He missed his man, but was on his heels and into the kitchen with him in a frenzied rush. Sanchard still held his weapon; but in this confined space, amid ranges and dish-racks and men, evasion was difficult. Mackay was almost upon him when he swung about, whirling the carafe.

Mackay ducked the blow, and the carafe smashed on a stanchion. He knocked Sanchard backward and grappled with him; at this, all hell broke loose. The man was a wild insensate fury. He went down under Mackay's grip, but cooks and dish-washers piled into the fray with any weapon to hand. Mackay glimpsed a meat-cleaver descending upon him and writhed frantically aside. Someone else caught that blow; blood spurted; a scream shrilled out.

Forth from the frantic melee crawled Sanchard, gained his feet, and started for the back door. Mackay was after him and on him, fetching him down with a flying tackle and rolling with him, gouging and fighting and tearing. Somehow they regained their footing, both of them flailing away. Mackay had his man now, was sure of him, was finishing him with hard

smashing blows to the head, when—*crash!*—a cook, swinging from behind, flailed him over the head with an iron skillet.

Mackay went staggering, reeling away in a blind daze; he brought up against a wall and flung out his arms to keep from falling. Tumultuous voices dinned in his brain, only to fall into sudden silence. His eyes cleared. He found himself looking at a scene where all motion seemed frozen and halted.

There was Sanchard, the open doorway before him, dashing blood from his eyes. And there, shambling forward in the doorway, looking up at him and grinning, was the cripple Mario. The cripple was saying something; what it was, Mackay never knew. For Sanchard hit out abruptly, smashing the little man across the face, knocking him aside. But as Mario fell away, a long knife glinted in his hand; and he struck, desperately.

The spell of frozen horror was broken. Shouting figures came rushing forward in mad haste; through the tumult, Mackay saw the reddened knife striking and striking again. Then whistles shrilled, more men shoved in, everything fell into calm and quiet order, with Sanchard lying under the light and jerking one leg spasmodically, over and over—still alive.

IN the back room of the secondhand shop Mackay sat at the table, a bandage about his head: the skillet had struck deep. He watched while Hiram Widsun set out crackers and cheese and beer on the table. Widsun turned to the safe and pulled open the door; he took a little notebook from his pocket and thrust it into the safe, then dropped into a chair with a sigh.

Taking off his battered derby, he fingered a crack across it.

"This saved me when that carate hit me," he observed, then started up. "Blast it, I clear forgot!"

He took from the table the tattered paper bag resting there, in which he had brought Sinclair's ruined headgear, and thrust it into the safe, then resumed his chair.

"You have a lot to explain," said Mackay.

Widsun shook his head. "I don't explain nothing, sir. It's lucky Sanchard aint dead. Now he'll go behind the bars, and that hat may yet tie him up with Mr. Sinclair's murder."

"But that little notebook of yours, and what was in it—"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Mackay, that's between him and me," Widsun said stubbornly. "I don't like explanations; I can't abide 'em. What's done is done, is my motto. I hope you and me will work together in future, but don't ask for no explanations. I got

you in mind to help with some Chinese doings, like I mentioned."

"Then you weren't being so careless with fifty thousand dollars, after all!"

"I aint never careless with money, Mr. Mackay. The only good money is for, is to spend; but how it's spent is another matter. I borrowed that pocketbook and money from some friends of mine—Federal men, who took it off Elder's body. No sir, I wasn't being careless with it."

Mackay's thoughts slanted off and away, as the background of this affair began to assume greater vistas. How far back had Widsun's schemes begun—how far forward had the man laid his peculiar plans? By what miracle of patient thought and planning? No, no! It was luck, and nothing else.

"Just the same, you're out a lot of coin," he said. "Beyond the satisfaction of busting up the Sanchard organization, what do you get out of it? You're no enforcement officer. You'll pocket no reward. You're sending a lawyer to defend that cripple Mario and get him off, which means more expense. Well, why? What's in it for you?"

"Plenty, sir, plenty," said Widsun. He carefully opened a bottle of beer, watched the bead foam, then relaxed. He fumbled in his pocket and took out a folded newspaper clipping; it was the picture of the Bruno boy. "Does this look the same to you?"

Mackay glanced at it.

"Yes, you showed me that before. It looks the same, of course."

"It don't to me," Widsun looked at the picture. His pale blue eyes warmed and softened; his face changed, took on feeling and expression and sympathy. He nodded, then folded the picture and replaced it in his pocket.

"And that answers your question," he said. "This kid has a smile like he never had before, except maybe when he used to set in this room and talk about his ma."

"But you said he was dead," exclaimed Mackay, then broke off, cursing his own lack of comprehension.

Widsun nodded at him. "Yes sir. But when you can make a dead person smile like that, it's the most wonderful thing there is! And now, Mr. Mackay, I'd like to have your opinion of this cheese. It's been ripening three years and more, up in Herkimer County."

Mackay blinked. A sentimental old fool—an eccentric crackpot—a shrewd brain behind a grotesque exterior—or just an idealist who played in luck?

"Hanged if I can figure it out," he murmured. "I give up. Give me some of that beer, and I'll quit worrying about it."

"A good idea," said Widsun. The pale blue eyes broke into a decided twinkle. "A very good idea, sir. And try this cheese, to go with the beer."

A Matlow's

A hair-raising story, by RICHARD



LIKE a badger diving red-eyed into his hole after forcing a trap, Leading Signalman Hooky Walker disappeared into the mess decks of His Majesty's Canadian corvette *Strachan*. Loose from the clutches of the shore blokes at the dockyard, his instinct was to go to earth to lick his wounds.

But licking wounds was not enough for a hairy-chested matlow like Hooky Walker. Within twenty minutes he was plotting a request to grow a beard. Hooky's beard was dynamite.

Torpedo Coxswain John MacInnis, senior executive rating in the corvette, hit his desk with a massive fist.

"Ye can't do it, man!" The desk shuddered again. "Half the ratings in her swear them Jeremiah whiskers o' yours spoil the luck o' the ship. Remember that sub we missed? And the looks! With you on deck sprouting that straggly awful mat o' black bristles, the king's own yacht would look like a South Sea copra schooner!"

Hooky Walker threw back shoulders, rounded in youth from overmuch tending of cod-lines in a bouncing ice-cruised dory. He looked with blank eyes into the appealing face of his superior.

"Shaving in this North Atlantic weather takes the skin off my face, 'Swain," he said. "I'm requesting a beard."

"And stay aboard three full weeks to start it?"

"What's the beach got for me?" Hooky asked bleakly.

"And keep it on a full six months, Hooky?" MacInnis asked. "Just for a grudge?"

"D'you know what a bottle they handed me? Fair blasted me off the deck, they did. I'm putting in."

"Tell me all about it, Hooky," the 'Swain said mendaciously. . . .

Like a trickle of petrol alight on a steel deck, the news swept forward from the Coxswain's little room close under the tiller flat.

"Hooky's taking the veil again!" the juvenile messman squeaked. "An' the grouch that goes with it!"

"That's bad!" said Lofty Curran. His long body slumped against the depth-charge rack. "And we needin' all the luck a ship can have if we're bound where I think we'll be bound."

The A.B. next to him scuffed a foot. "Ye're superstitious," he said. "Hooky just streams that moth-eaten mull when he's sore at the world. It's him being low, not the whiskers, that gets the ship down."

The trouble that was on the ship spread past men by the pompom platform, the ashcan-throwers, the Carley floats the seaboard on the fiddly deck.

"Once in the graveyard watch, feeling for the bridge ladder, I shoved my

hand into Hooky's whiskers," an Asdic rating said. "It was like touching an electric porcupine. I didn't go overside, but they must ha' heard my yell at Newfiejohn, two days astern."

Down in the wardroom, ten minutes later, two sublieutenants were amused. But Mr. Maynard, the First Lieutenant, known in the mess decks as the Bloke, or Number One, was not.

"It's psychological, sir," he said to the inquiring Old Man, who was newly come to the ship. "Plenty of men in the R.C.N. wear beards. But the jumping jeepers get into the *Strachan* when Hooky Walker flies those sable whiskers."

"Trouble-maker?"

"Just the reverse without the beard, sir. Good-humored, spins yarns, gives the younger hands sound advice, and is just enough of a horrible example to be convincing. When he goes hermit—" Mr. Maynard shook his head. "Quarrels, complaints, inattentive look-outs, tension, defaulters, slackness all over the ship. Queer but true."

Captain Calder meditated. "Could he have a tender skin?" he asked, touching his own ever-raw jawbone.

"You couldn't chafe his shark hide with a meat-ax, sir," Mr. Maynard said succinctly. "Will you refuse his request?"

The Old Man shook his head. "That right goes a long way back," he said. "Strange that Walker should nurse a grudge. We did all we could to get him clear—succeeded, too."

"It was the reprimand, sir," the First Lieutenant said.

"A less understanding court might have given him Number One," Captain Calder said. "Execution or such punishment as is hereinafter mentioned." It's amazing that an old hand like Walker should have consorted with an enemy agent, no matter how gullible or amateurish the Jerry seemed. He frowned. "Nevertheless, if he makes that request, I'll grant it."

AFT in his room, the 'Swain was still lending a soothing ear to Hooky.

"They thought I did it for the drinks," Hooky said. He shook a shocked head.

*Matlow (măt'lō) n. [Fr. *Matelot*.] ▲ sailor. —Webster.

Beard Is Dynamite

HOWELLS WATKINS

The 'Swain was worried. Was that a little black stubble already reconnoitering Hooky's square jaw?

"What would I be doing in a joint like that," Hooky asked, "out of bounds for us matlows, talking to a fellow with a German accent, if not drinking? Combining pleasure an' patriotism."

"But ye did tell this prying Jerry about the dockyard?"

"I told him it was the location of the Commanding Officer, Atlantic Coast; the Naval Officer in Charge, Halifax; the Supervising Naval Engineer, Maritimes; the Engineer Super, the Inspector of Naval Ordnance, the Royal Canadian Naval Barracks an' the Chief Engineer, besides accommodating Naval Stores, the Treasury Department, the U.S. Navy, the Medical Services and Munitions and Supply."

The 'Swain's eyes bulged under his furry brows; he made an angry move.

"All lifted out of the Halifax telephone book," Hooky added quickly. "Under 'HMC Dockyard, telephone Number B 1161.'"

Coxswain MacInnis relaxed. He coughed behind his hand. "Some men will do anything for a drink," he said sternly. "'Tis a gr-and thing for you, man, that the transplanted Scots sense o' humor was well represented on that court of officers."

Hooky Walker stood up. He tugged at his waistband.

"I was catching this spying Fritzie," he said with dignity. "He was lapping up my information when I left him a minute. In the washroom I grabbed a pipsqueak ordinary seaman and sent him to get the M.P.'s, the Mounties—anybody. Then I went back an' whispered secret' dope listed under 'Naval Magazine, Bedford Basin.' If that little scut of an O.D. hadn't let me down, I'd have had the Hitler-heiler safe under arrest before these Intelligence officers, who'd been shadowing him, grabbed him and me too."

"Didn't the O.D. testify for you?"

"Him? He must ha' crawled under a stone." Hooky Walker's face twisted in horrible menace. "If ever I find an' lay hands on that button-nosed young loblolly, I'll tear him up into cleaning rags. I couldn't prove there'd been any such person in the joint. . . . So I'm putting in for it," he declared.

*Illustrated
by
Cleveland
Woodward*



The 'Swain followed him up on deck. The matlows at the ashcan rack were looking out into the stream.

A corvette which had sailed that morning was breasting the tide inbound with painful sluggishness. In her rigging were set two black balls.

"Probably engines," Lofty Curran said. "That means a relief ship. Who feels lucky about us getting a couple more days in port now?"

MACINNIS grasped hastily at this straw.

"If I didn't care to be blamed—" he muttered to Hooky.

"Let 'em blame the stranding of Noah's Ark on my beard," Hooky said fiercely. "Reprimanded me, those shore blokes did. And me in the Navy for fourteen years!"

Lofty Curran's dismal surmise came true. The *Strachan* sailed that night. Her course was northeasterly. That could mean Newfiejohn or the unpopular island known merely as the Fjord—Iceland.

"They want Hooky at sea before he sends Hitler a postcard about the latest in anti-sub devices," Leading Seaman Taff Lewis said, grinning across the table in the rolling mess deck.

Hooky emerged from his dignified isolation. "I'll fight any six o' you, right hand tied behind my back," he challenged.

If he had made it one in an even go, he would have had customers. The ratings off watch merely grinned uncomfortably.

"And go round for life with the shape of your mug tattooed by black bristles on my fist?" Lofty said. "'Tis no inducement, man."

"Whatever," Taff added.

Whether due to Hooky's budding whiskers or not, their port was St. Johns. Hooky was not permitted shore leave while his beard was blossoming. He spent much time with binoculars, looking over young O.D.'s on near-by ships. No luck.

The *Strachan's* next orders took her to Iceland. Day after day she zig-zagged eastward as after sweep of a slow convoy. Through cold green seas she thrust, seas that sometimes turned solid white and coated the foredeck. This made life uncertain for the crew of the four-inch when they cleaned the gun and moved her through the full limits of elevation and training.

Nobody rode Hooky much, for all hands reckoned his gloom was something to be endured, like the weather.

"A good guy when he feels that way, but he's adrift just now," he heard Yank Ball say. Hooky's conscience jumped like a bad tooth. After all, he was taking it out on his mates for that blast he'd been handed on the beach.

"A shave by Hooky Walker would give the whole United Nations a leg-up," he told himself. His pride was mixed with unease. "But even if I forgot me own self-respect, the regulations say I've got to wear these whiskers for six months. It's up to them, not me."

They delivered their convoy, unscathed, at Torpedo Junction, south of Iceland. Other escorts took over.

IT was still blowing hard at Reykjavik. Sulphurous men stood sea watches while the *Strachan*, with two anchors down, steamed into a snoring gale with hard, patient rocks waiting astern.

"If this is a port I'll take a hurricane," Lofty said.

"It likes to play tunes in Hooky's whiskers," Yank Ball said.

But nobody was pleased when the *Strachan* was ordered before her time to head south to pick up and bring in a straggler with a valuable cargo. The wind might have eased.

"They don't want Hooky around to look at," somebody said.

The ship they sought, the motorship *Kashmir Queen*, had broken radio silence to report herself blown off to leeward for days while her engineers wrestled with a breakdown. A corvette had been detached from her convoy to look for her. Unsuccessful. Reports of subs close by made further radio communication too hazardous.

With the gale on the quarter, the *Strachan* dropped the rocky coast. It was normal going. Hooky brooded behind his somber fringe. He was beginning to get fed up with dignified martyrdom. A matlow needed a little talk and fun. But pride forbade unbending, just as regulations forbade ditching this beard.

In his watches below in the rumbling bowels of the ship, he toiled upon a vindication. That was the word—vindication! It boiled down to proving he had sent that pipsqueak O.D. for police. The soft red lights permitted during the hours of darkness were dim and dimmed his mind, too. It was hard going.

"The damn' words move so cold and awkward, like, when you spread 'em thin on paper," he confided once to the 'Swain. "In a cause like this, they ought to gush hot and sharp, but they've a gait like a lame donkey."

"Leave it, man," John MacInnis advised. "The bit o' cautioning they dropped in your ears ashore is gone down the wind long since."

But Hooky closed his black-fringed jaws with a click.

"If I can only straighten out these brassbound shore blokes, I can save myself an' be easy shipmates again with the lads," he told himself. But hadn't the shore blokes seen that he

really had mixed in with his patriotism the love of a joke and a drink on this Jerry? An unpleasant thought. Softly he cursed out the vanishing pipsqueak of an O.D. He worked on stubbornly, until he became queerly conscious of a smell of burning hair. He jerked his head up off the table, bewildered. Awake, he discovered that his pipe had singed the port side of his beard. He inspected himself in his shaving mirror. He grinned lopsidedly. That made it worse.

An idea struck his brain. He sat rigid, thinking. He got up and stole into the leading hands' washroom. He struck a match. With sudden decision he held the light close and enlarged the gap in his beard. He kept singeing till he looked fit to frighten a witch-doctor.

"Now maybe the Bloke will know some way around the reg's to finish the job," he told himself. "They can't let me go like this."

He retired to his hammock. . . .

That morning watch he stumbled up on deck, to find the ship moving slowly through a cramped whiteness that narrowed the sea. The fog struck through a man worse than a keen wind. The stuff felt like an iceberg gone soft enough to sail through.

"We're approaching the position where we should pick up this straggler," the signalman of the watch told him, and jerked a cynical thumb at the opaque atmosphere overside. "In this, mind you! If we stumble on anything, it'll be the *Glenora*, the other corvette that's looking. That's how life is."

"Don't tell me about life, boy," Hooky said. "You're relieved."

His head retreated deeper into the hood of his duffle coat, like a turtle retiring from the world.

Though the watch was the Bloke's, the Old Man and the Pilot were both shuttling between the bridge and the nook in the Asdic house reserved for the charts. After a bit the 'Swain turned up too.

"The pilot there will be running a position plot on our search just like we were in action," he said. "But this fog won't last, I know."

Of a sudden he bent forward in the increasing light of dawn and stared at Hooky's face. "Good Lord, man, what bit ye?"

"Scorched my beard," Hooky said, thrusting it forward.

The 'Swain inspected, wincing. "It's a judgment on us," he said. "Though what for, I'm not knowing. Ye look like something from the bottom o' the sea."

With resolution the *Strachan* settled down to combing the area. She had means of searching in fog. And of course if she chanced to hook in on a sub, instead—

"Then we could combine business an' pleasure, like you did, on the beach," the 'Swain said cheerfully to Hooky.

"Has an officer the power to order the shaving of a mutilated beard?" he asked the 'Swain.

"Being singed like that, it's no longer a full beard, which is the only kind allowed," the 'Swain hedged.

"But there's more of it than fifty per cent," Hooky said. "A case for a sea lawyer, it is."

The 'Swain laid a hand on his arm. The move was quick, commanding.

Instinctively Hooky's gaze leaped seaward. The fog was thinning. Next instant his eyes followed the 'Swain's to the bridge. They brought up with a start.

The tension in that group of officers meant one thing—a contact. Would gongs be hammering out *Action Stations*? The mist still dimmed eyes. This must be a touch through the Asdic gear with something deep in that whiteness. What?

Without a word the 'Swain ran down the ladder to the wheelhouse and his one job of physical work at sea. While the ship was in action, he, John MacInnis, took the wheel.

Hooky waited for the next report from the A/S house. He saw the Old Man's head turn sharply to port. As that happened, the port bridge lookout sang out:

"Ship broad on the port bow!"

THROUGH the vapor, she came. Ghostly details of her superstructure hardened swiftly into rigid steel. She was still a mile away.

She was no big new motorship, and no corvette. This was a rust-streaked little three-island tramper—Norwegian, Hooky decided.

The Old Man spoke a word to Number One. The Bloke reached for the button. Gongs clamored. Men, waking and sleeping, jumped into one accustomed pattern of movement. Hooky switched on the powerful shuttered light of the signal projector aloft on the port side of the bridge. His eyes, sharp as hooks, strained through the dim light. This ship out of the fog flew nothing on her signal halliards—not even a recognition signal. Abruptly he saw why Captain Calder had sounded *Action Stations*. The old tramper was throwing a big bow wave. She was making knots. He saw something else.

"Too many men in her!" Hooky said to the signalman now beside him. Too many heads were showing above the canvas dodger on her bridge. Too many men were visible on her decks for a simple Norwegian freighter, lost from a convoy.

At word from the watch officer, Hooky began flashing out to her a



curt order to stop. The shutter of the big projector flickered in the speed of his transmission. But before he completed the signal, he saw her swinging hard to starboard toward a fog-bank. Guns spoke down the voice tube to the captain of the four-inch on the foredeck.

Forward of the bow of the freighter a small fountain gushed upward and fell flat. In Hooky's surprised ears sounded the sharp crack of a distant gun. Distant? There was no doubt about it. Some third ship still invisible to the *Strachan* had taken a hand in the action.

His eyes remained glued to the bridge of the freighter to catch any answer to his signal. That was his job. His ears picked up the cry of the port bridge lookout:

"Ship, sir! Two points on the port bow!"

"It's a corvette, sir!" an officer said. "And she must have been after this fellow."

The *Strachan* had stumbled on a game of hide and seek in the fog. With her coming and the lifting of the fog, the game was over. The bow wave piling up before the stem of the rusty ship fell away. She was stopping.

The Germans rushed to shelter, away from the side.

"Ensign's coming down, sir!" Hooky Walker cried. "I can see it—Norwegian!"

A moment later there was a subdued grunt from the group on the bridge. Another flag was going up on the staff—a swastika, this time.

The Old Man spoke to the First Lieutenant. His quick words fairly crackled.

"Her game's to scuttle. Away the seaboard, Mr. Maynard. Stop 'em!"

The Bloke, on a dead run for the ladder, picked up Hooky Walker with his eyes. They wouldn't launch a boat without Hooky—not without the old fisherman, by Peter! The boatswain's call was shrilling. "Take over!" Hooky said to his mate, and pelted after the Bloke.

The *Strachan* was churning toward the Nazi as they prepared to lower. The Old Man was saving seconds by closing in. But he had every gun trained on the rusty ship in case she still wanted to play. He put one shot close to her bow.

Rifles, helmets, life-preservers! Get the boat clear of the ship's side without cracking, and she'd ride these big

swells like a celluloid duck. The Bloke, in the sternsheets, watched the seas.

"Unhook aft! Unhook forward! Shove off!"

They were away. The disgusted crew of the silent four-inch gun gave them a raucous cheer. Hooky raised his eyes to the bridge as he swung his oar. Captain Calder was watching the Nazi. His arms were rigid as they held the binoculars. She could be either a raider, or a blockade-runner exchanging with Japan the loot of Europe for the loot of the East.

"The other corvette has a boat in the water," said Mr. Maynard. His voice was casual. "She's closer."

"Break your blasted backs!" cried Hooky.

The Bloke smiled at him, then stared wide-eyed at the ravaged beard.

"My Lord, Walker!" he said. "Bow oar, watch it!"

The men pulled hard. They all knew how vital it was to take this ship unsunk in order to see her cargo. Information, that was what officers wanted. What were the Germans sending the Japs?

Nazis were bunched to lower the port lifeboat. The Bloke steered toward the side of the ship beneath it.

One German near the davits bawled angrily at them.

"Stop!" the First Lieutenant shouted. "Get away from that boat! Away! Do not scuttle!"

They did not stop.

"Gunner!" said Mr. Maynard to the quarters rating with the stripped Lewis gun. "Put a few shots over them. Then fire a burst through the bottom of that boat."

"Aye, sir!" said the quarters rating, with more emphasis than naval etiquette demanded. The gun chattered. The Germans rushed to shelter away from the side.

"Try for the forward boat-falls," the Bloke commanded.

The Lewis gunner obliged with a burst that cut the ropes. The bow of the boat dropped. It crashed onto the water. The boat dangled by the other tackle.

"Two men to swarm up that boat and drop us lines or a ladder," Maynard said. "You, Lewis? Frost? Right. We'll cover you."

They drew alongside the upended boat. The Bloke grunted. He was staring along the high side of the ship. A lifeboat had come into view astern. It was the Nazis' starboard boat, pulling hard away from the ship. Already half the Germans had left her.

A COUPLE of heads appeared at the Nazi's rail—Canadian sailors.

"Have a ladder, mates!" one man shouted down. "We're ahead o' ye." A Jacob's latter unwound with a clatter against the steel plates. There was a mutter of disappointment from the *Strathan's* men. They had lost the race.

"Anyhow, we stopped the lifeboat on our side," muttered the gunner. "Any monkey can scramble up a boat-fall."

The Bloke led the way up the ladder. Hooky climbed at his heels. One of the men from the other corvette, a puny, grinning fellow, was waiting for them on the well-deck.

Hooky scowled. Then he uttered a yell. His eyes blazed. He plunged toward the O.D. That face! This was the button-nosed young loblolly he had sent to bring in the Mounties!

The young seaman recoiled at the horrible sight of Hooky Walker, eyes and teeth a gleam. That burnt, mutilated, maniacal beard framed a contorted mouth.

The O.D.'s blood froze in his veins. His singed apparition, plainly hot from hell, shot toward him.

He broke into a run. He ran, though not from a mere mortal man.

"You!" cried Hooky. "I'll cut you—"

The O.D.'s eyes jerked backward as he pelted on. The face behind was fierce, but perhaps it was human.

*"Go get my
Lieutenant
Maynard.
And this
time, you
quitter
— come
back!"*



"Steady, matel!" he wailed, but the feet behind pounded harder on the steel deck.

The O.D. plunged into the port alleyway. His headlong rush brought confusion to a group of Nazis emerging from the door leading down to the engine-room. At the sight of two armed and furious men rushing them, the Germans whirled and dived back down the engine-room ladder.

With remarkable agility the O.D. slowed pace enough to change course. He dived through the open door. Hooky, trying the same thing, slid on the greasy deck. He fell. His jaw brought up against the bolt of his rifle. Blood gushed from his chin. He was up in an instant and through the doorway. His blood-smeared countenance changed the mind of the O.D., who had paused at the head of the steel ladder. He dived in the line of retreat of the Nazis. Hooky followed.

Of a sudden the ladder down which he was running bucked and shook under Hooky. A tremendous, roaring noise hammered his ears. The whole ship was heaving upward as if she had hit the rocks. Still groggy from his fall, he pitched forward onto the O.D. They went down in a heap on the steel grating below.

"A mine!" Hooky gasped. "They're blowing her up!" That one had been

forward. But the next— He grabbed the sailor by his scrawny neck. "Come back, you! Before they kick the bottom out of her, you'll tell my officer! You'll tell him I sent you for the cops back in that Halifax joint."

The O.D. stared at him, jaws agape. "You're—that one!" he panted, with relief. "You're not nuts? Is that why you've been chasing—"

He twisted his long body out of Hooky's grip. "Mate, we got to get out o' here!"

He fended off Hooky's grab. "Listen, mate, I nearly ran afoul of Navy officers crashing in to grab your nasty spy. Why would I go get more? I just faded away from the joint. Look, man!"

He pointed down at the half-dozen Germans brought to bay on the engine-room plates. They were thrashing arms and shouting. One of them made an unmistakable gesture, pointing downward and then flinging his arms upward and outward. They surged toward the ladder.

"Hold your grudge, an' let's get on with the war, killick," the O.D. implored. "That Jerry means another mine's going up—an' it's planted down here. They're coming up!"

One Nazi grabbed the hand-rails and put a foot on the ladder. The others kept up their row.



Hooky caught up his gun. "Wait, you son!" he said to the O.D. He pointed his gun at the bunched Nazis. "Shut up!" he roared. "I'm doing the talking. Shut up! Put a sock on it, all of you! Back!"

With gun ready, he climbed down the last ladder. The two under the muzzle fell back, but the men behind were crowding forward.

"Mine!" a man in a peaked cap shouted at him. "Mine! It iss going up!"

Hooky stood firm. "You'd been down here setting it!" he said. "Cut that fuse . . . stop it . . . or you'll be here when the bottom blows."

His bleeding face glowered challenge at them. His finger was curled around the trigger. He was set to shoot.

"Up an' tell my officer, you swab!" he said out of the corner of his mouth. "Quick! Run! It won't be the first time."

The O.D. had his gun leveled too. "It's me they're scairt of," he said steadily. He didn't move.

Things were suddenly very quiet in the engine-room. The long pistons of the old up-and-down engine waited. Very quiet.

The man with the peaked cap below moved his arm suddenly to stare at his wrist-watch. He looked up at

the rigid Canadians. He growled an order.

A big man in dungarees turned. With fumbling haste he pried up a plate and squirmed below into the double bottom. In a moment he emerged and nodded at his officer. The officer spoke sullenly to Hooky Walker.

"She sinks anyhow," he said, jerking his hand forward. "One mine will sink her."

"They're restin' easier," Hooky Walker said to the O.D. "But I'll keep 'em here, in case. Go get my Lieutenant Maynard. And this time, you quitter—come back!"

The O.D. scrutinized the Nazis and lowered his gun. "Look, mate, you chased me down here on private business. But you can scoop up the glory for this to balance the bad break you got on the beach. That's justice, isn't it? An' that's what the war's about, isn't it?"

"You could be right, sea lawyer," Hooky Walker said. A beatific smile struggled against the natural and opposing obstacles of his face. "Hop up that ladder!"

The boarding parties worked hard to shore up bulkheads forward and throw the water out of her with steam and with sweat. The Bloke knew that sort of thing—it was his job when

the *Strachan* went into action. He kept this blockade runner above water.

Thanks to Hooky Walker's inspired action in preventing the Nazis from kicking the bottom out of the engine-room, the other corvette resigned the job of escorting the Nazi to the base. Minus men contributed to the prize crew, she resumed the hunt for the *Kashmir Queen*. . . .

Hooky Walker was still troubled in his mind.

"Sir," he said to the Bloke, "it's hard to bandage my chin with this beard sticking out. But the regulations say—"

The Bloke's eye had that elusive glint. "The regulations don't prevent a man getting medical attention, Walker," he said. "Shave it. You'll want to come into the open, anyhow, for the photographers after I make my report on your—um—vindication."

Hooky Walker split his face in a grin. "Yes sir," he said.

Hastily he sought out the button nosed young loblolly.

"Here, you barber's clerk, you," he said. "I'm promotin' you to barber. Get busy."

"I don't wonder you're afraid to face yourself in a mirror," the O.D. said. "It takes a braver— Ouch! Next, sir!"



The STARS SHINE

The story thus far:

THIS divorced wife of a brother-officer was no special attraction to Steve Wyatt. But she was someone to talk to, anyway; and about the old days. In this town of San Eliséo he didn't know a soul, though he was supposed to be on a well-earned leave for the purpose of relaxation.

But shortly after Brenda Rhule had left him to rejoin the group with whom she was dining, Steve leaned forward and stared at a girl who had appeared in the crowd below. For he had never before seen a girl like this one. Ten years of serving on the Mexican border in cavalry posts didn't give you many of that glamorous sort.

And then—a man spoke to her; a stranger evidently, but a smoothie, pointing out objects and people of interest to her. And presently this fellow persuaded her to the door leading to the patio.

Something very phony about this, Major Wyatt decided, and he walked downstairs and out the door into the dark patio himself: Two men were forcing the girl into a car.

Steve Wyatt was big, and he was strong, and he was fit. And now he was brutally aroused. In the fight that followed, one man was left dead, shot by his own pistol; another was knocked unconscious, and the third fled. Steve got the girl into a taxi, and sent her to

her hotel; she promised to meet him there next noon. Then he went back to the scene of the fight to recover a scarf she had dropped; and he found it, but the dead man and the car were gone. And next day the girl—he did not even know her name—failed to keep her appointment.

Steve went back to the Post, to find it full of rumors that his regiment of young Texas cavalrymen was to be made over—probably into paratroopers. And he met the new commander General Thrane, and his daughter. . . . Mallory Thrane did not recognize him, but he knew her at once for the heroine of that adventure in San Eliséo. *(The story continues in detail.)*

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BRIGHT

A Novel of our Professional Army in Wartime

by *Charles L. Clifford*

SOMEbody cut in, and he went over to one of the open doors that led out to the porch. He stood and watched the dancers. He watched Mallory Thrale; Mac was dancing with her now, in his slow and stately way. He wasn't as tall as she was, and as he looked up at her, said something with that mild smile on his brown face, Steve felt a pang of sympathy for him.

He cut in on Nancy Vance. She gave him a quick, sly look.

"Fate beat you to it. Trying to tip off Kirk Rhule," she said smugly.

"That's not very kind, is it?"

"He had that surprise coming to him. I'll admit he took it well. And here he comes now to cut in on me."

"Take it easy, Nancy."

Kirk cut in pleasantly. And just before the music ended, Steve was dancing with Mallory Thrale.

"Let's get out in the air," she said. "That's swell music, but I still haven't got used to the Texas heat."

The porch was crowded, and she looked it over swiftly, then up at the heavy mat of stars, and down at the sheen of the river where it ran under the great live-oaks.

"I was in that pool this afternoon," she said. "Beautiful there, isn't it?"

"Do you want to walk down?"

"I'd like to."

They went down the outside steps, and he was embarrassedly aware that

all eyes seemed to be on them. They walked in silence, came under the deep shadows of the trees. The spring that formed the river was dammed here and the trees hung over it, the stars breaking in with their quick light and lending an air of eternal peace to the place.

She took his arm, and they stared for a while at the water. He was aware of a strange quiet in her, a sense of suppression. He looked at her, and saw that now she was watching him.

"Who's the girl?" she asked quietly.

"A visitor at the Vances'."

"Know her before?"

"A long time ago."

"Army?"

"No."

"Where's she from?"

"I think she lives in San Eliseo now."

"She's very attractive."

"Yes, she is."

She looked at him sidewise, and there was a gleam of humor in her eyes. "Well, that's that, then. Let's sit a moment by this big tree."

There was a bench set against a huge pecan, and they sat quietly, staring across the dim water, listening to the distant music. She was about to speak when there was a sound of feet on the concrete embankment, the sound of a voice. Someone had stopped just behind the great tree. It was Nancy Vance's voice. She was saying:

"I asked Brenda here. She said Steve had been seeing her in San Eliseo. He just came back from leave up there, didn't he?"

The small laugh that followed the words was unmistakable in its insinuation.

There was a hard silence, just the faint, steady ripple of the water over the dam. Then Kirk Rhule said in a strained voice:

"I see. He didn't mention San Eliseo to me. Or—having seen Brenda." The steps started, went on; the voices died. Steve Wyatt sat stiff and unbelieving on the hard wooden seat. Mallory Thrale sat beside him, very erect now, her head lifted, her eyes fixed on the distant stars.

"Have you a cigarette?"

He gave her one, lighted it for her. She nodded, looked off across the water.

"Is that her name? Brenda?"

He was too confused, too stunned with what he had just heard, to know what to say. He hated to denounce Nancy Vance to this girl whom he had known only a few days—a girl who hadn't been too frank with him, too honest. And yet a moment ago, for a few forgetting instants, he had seemed so close to her.

"There's some mistake," he said at last, in quiet desperation. "I can't quite—"

She said coolly: "You don't have to explain or apologize to me. There's no reason in the world why you should."

"I wasn't apologizing. I would like to explain."

She gave him a cool smile. "It isn't necessary. But what is Kirk's objection, by the way?"

He didn't know how to answer that. He stared out at the water, angry, humiliated, hurt by the hateful serenity of this girl with whom—he admitted to himself—he was falling in love. She was a little too quick on the trigger, too ready to be on the wing when

something touched her pride, blocked her arrogant progress.

"Did he know her before too? Or is he just concerned over an old pal? It sounded as though the lady had a past."

"You'd better ask Kirk about that," he said harshly.

She looked at him then, and smiled. She put a hand over his as it lay taut on the bench between them.

"Come now! You know you're just like a rude little boy. You don't really think I'll ever mention this, do you?"

He said nothing.

"Do you?" She looked up at him with such persistent demand that he had to speak.

"No," he said.

"Well then, let's go up and dance. Before something else happens! We seem to be a pair that starts things."

THE music was playing when they came onto the porch. Officers from the stag line moved toward them; one had Mallory Thrale dancing as soon as she entered the room. Steve Wyatt looked around for Nancy Vance. He saw no sign of her. Joe and Mac were talking by the punch-bowl. General Thrale was dancing with the quartermaster's wife; Kirk Rhule was nowhere in sight.

"What became of you?" Brenda touched his arm, smiled up at him brightly. He danced out on the floor with her. "Have you talked to Kirk?"

"No. I haven't. But I want to." At his brusque tone, she looked up at him with a hint of bewilderment.

"What is it, Steve?"

He saw Mallory dancing and chatting gayly with his adjutant. It added to his anger, somehow.

"What did you tell Nancy Vance?"

"Why, nothing, Steve. Nothing special. What do you mean?" She stopped dancing, stood looking up at him, puzzled.

"About me?"

"Only what you'd expect. Did she say something?"

"Not to me."

"Suppose you tell me." He was surprised at the hardness of the look that flashed for an instant in her dark eyes. She took his arm, drew him almost roughly toward the stairs. Upset as he was, he still had time to notice glances of interest thrown their way. They were almost down the main stairs, had come to the turn before the big lower room, when they met Kirk Rhule face to face. Brenda stopped, still holding Steve's arm tightly against hers.

"Kirk!"

Rhule's face was dead white, his eyes burning as he gave her a straight, long look.

"Kirk!" Steve Wyatt said. "Come on outside. I want to talk with you."

"There's nothing I want to say—to either of you," Kirk Rhule said, and he brushed by them and swiftly went up the stairs.

Brenda stood there, rigid. Wyatt was amazed at the look in her eyes. A little frightened! He was about to take her arm, lead her down the stairs, when Nancy Vance seemed almost to spring up the stairs at them.

"You beat it, Steve!" she said, and she took Brenda, almost dragged her out of sight around the bend of the stairs.

Steve Wyatt turned, walked slowly away. The band was playing "Down at the Friendly Tavern" and he thought miserably:

"And that's really where I'd like to be."

General Thrale stopped him, smiling. He had been leaning over the stair rail, watching the dancers.

"How are you, Wyatt? This is an interesting building, isn't it?"

"Yes sir. It used to be an old fort."

"So I heard. By the way, it's too bad about the horses. I hope you'll all understand. This is something bigger than horses. Monday, when we go over the new schedule, you'll understand."

"I think I have an idea now, sir."

"I expect you have. I want you to have. But there are too many people we don't want to have." His eyes were hard and steady now, hostile almost.

"I can understand that, of course, sir."

"Yes. So the training must be comprehensive. Too much so, perhaps. The exact objective has to be obscured to a certain extent. It's going to be almost brutally intensive. But I can tell from what little I've seen here that you have the men. They're hard as nails. They'll make it."

"I'm sure they will, sir."

General Thrale was watching him keenly, sensed his thoughts, perhaps. He said quietly:

"I heard about the talk you gave your non-coms the other day, Wyatt. Before some of them might have asked for a transfer. That was a very proper and militarily right thing to do."

Now was the time if ever. Steve decided, to ask the question that was burning in him.

"I wonder—would it be proper, General, if I asked you about when we are going across?"

Thrale looked at him—for ages, it seemed. But there was no quick hardening of those deep set blue eyes. Almost reflective, they appeared; and then he said, as though just coming to the decision:

"It's up to you. And your men. I hope within two months."

Steve Wyatt felt the sort of thrill he had once had jumping from a disabled plane.

Two months—if they were ready. Well, he was ready now. And his men would be ready; that's one thing he was certain of.

"We'll be ready, sir."

"I'm sure you will."

The music stopped and Mallory Thrale came over and thrust her arm through her father's. She smiled up at him; and Steve Wyatt, watching the change in his eyes, knew that this man had one weak spot, at least. Probably the only one. And he thought: Suppose he ever heard of that mess at the Rio Bar? Would he thank him for that? Or would he rave at his daughter for being in such a place alone, would his high pride burn, knowing that a junior in his outfit had seen his daughter at such disadvantage? Well, he wouldn't know and she wouldn't know: that's one advantage Steve had over both of them. . . .

Mallory Thrale gave him a brief bright smile, then again turned to her father with some bit of news. Steve walked over to Mac, who was still standing by the punch-bowl, mildly eying the room.

"Let's go down and get a beer."

An hour later Steve walked down the shadowy back road to his quarters. He could still hear the gay dance music behind him: ahead, the Post was dark and empty except for the quietly moving sentries lost in the shadows of their lonely beats.

ALONE, with his first chance to think, Steve wondered about that strange conversation he had overheard by the pool. It was incredible: almost beyond belief that Nancy Vance should have indulged in such a preposterous outburst. Granted, even, that Brenda should have given her the ammunition for it. And why should she have? Certainly through no act of encouragement from him. The only other possibility was a whole-cloth invention of Nancy's for some obscure purpose of her own. Wishful thinking or personal hate of Kirk Rhule were the only reasons he could think of.

He came into the small back yard. A light, he noticed, was in Kirk's bedroom. Despite the strict Post order about leaving on lights! He went up the two steps, to the kitchen; the door was swung half open. Place would be full of mosquitoes, he thought, annoyed. He went through the small kitchen, the pantry.

The two bedrooms were off the living-room. Kirk's door was partly open, and a thrust of light hit the far end of the larger room.

Steve stopped. He thought he heard somebody in the bedroom. So Kirk was back. Sore, of course, and maybe packing up. Well—

"That you, Kirk?"



"We seem to be a pair that starts things," said Mallory.

There was no reply. But he heard a sound again, a sound as though something had slipped, fallen lightly on a table.

He went into the room. Brenda Adamson was sitting in a cane chair by the small Q.M. table. She looked very calm and unhurried; her arm was outstretched, the hand lying over a face-down silver-framed picture. She looked wistfully up at him.

"I didn't think anyone would be around. I came for something—*this*."

SHE lifted the picture so he could see the face of it. He remembered it at once. He had seen it years ago. It had stood beside the one of Kirk as a second lieutenant. It had been a beautiful face then: it still was. But not as beautiful, not as fully beautiful, as the face of the woman who now held it.

"How did you know he had it?"

"Your cook. She saw me at Nancy's. She told Nancy's cook. You know the sequence; you've been in the Army long enough."

"Was it that important? Kirk might have been here."

"I wish he had been. Yes, it was that important. Do you see why?"

She pointed to the top of the shabby dresser. In another frame, more modern, very handsome, was a photograph of Mallory Thrale. She wore, in that picture, Steve Wyatt noticed, the dress she had worn that distant night at the Rio Bar.

It angered him somehow, remembering that.

"I'm afraid I *don't* see, Brenda. Surely not jealousy?"

"Call it pride if you like. Have a cigarette?" She held a pack toward him, but he shook his head. He watched her, angered, strangely upset as she lit hers calmly and blew the smoke out slowly, voluptuously.

"Brenda?"

She looked at him with wide, almost eager eyes. "Yes, Steve?"

"Did you tell Nancy I'd been seeing you in San Eliséo?"

She met his look steadily, with no hint of evasion.

"Yes, Steve."

"Why?"

She looked down. She twisted the ring on her finger slowly.

"I don't know, Steve."

"You *don't* know?" For a moment he felt helpless, unable to think of a sensible thing to say. He stared at her and saw two great tears glow in her lowered eyes, then slide childlike down her smooth oval face.

"I suppose," she said in a muffled voice, "because I was glad I had seen you, and—I was lonely."

She looked up at him then, with such quick candor in her brimming eyes that instinctively he softened.

"You remember that night?" she asked. "At the Rio Bar? How I left you so abruptly?"

"I remember."

The cigarette was burning her fingers, and she crushed it out in the tray. She turned back to him, and her eyes were pleading with him.

"I was afraid, Steve."

"Afraid? Of what? I remember you sort of looked down at the bar—seemed upset."

She gave him a quick look, then glanced away. "Oh, no. My mind was far from there. I was seeing—I was afraid of myself. And you. The shock of seeing you. All the memories coming back with a rush."

"Memories? Of Kirk, you mean?"

"No. Not of Kirk. You had gone down the years alone: but not Kirk. You had stayed here, on the Border. You'd been true to your first ideals. You had, and you would continue to follow the simple path. You never were a woman-hater; you always were attractive to women, even attracted to them: but here you were, still unmarried. And that was because—it all came to me very clearly and very surely that night—a woman, a serious woman, had to make the first, and very serious gesture toward you. Had to *make* you see, not leave it for you to see. And I realized, too, that you had no moral or other rancor toward me—"

She stopped, her eyes still wet, dark with misery, begging him to understand. At least to pity.

"What did you tell Nancy, Brenda?"

"I wrestled with it. A thousand times I swore I wouldn't do it. But I did. I telephoned her from San Eliséo. I spoke of you. You know how all women are—all happily married women. They *want* to think something; and I let her think—that I wanted to see you. And it was true. And when I got here and she pressed me,—you know how excited she gets about people,—I perhaps let her think more. I'm sorry, Steve. But I hoped—well, you know how she tries to put anything over she believes in. How did you know?"

"I heard her telling Kirk. Shoving it down his throat."

"She was angry at the way he acted when he first saw me tonight. She waited for him to seek me out, make the first move. But when he didn't—"

"In other words," he said coldly, "she's so hipped on Kirk's supposed shoddy treatment of his wife years ago, that she wants to punish him now. Embarrass him with the girl he goes with; and to cap the climax, marry his friend off to his ex-wife and drop the whole thing in his lap."

"Please don't blame me, Steve."

She got up from the chair, moved by him into the living-room. He fol-

lowed her—perplexed, horribly unsure of himself, of everyone, everything. She stopped by the front door. In the faint light coming from the bedroom behind them, he could see her face dimly. It looked like a saint's face turned sorrowfully up to him. "I suppose what caused it all was that I *did* say you were the sort of man I *could* love. That any woman could, I really meant. You weren't petty or unbalanced emotionally like so many of them. And then I told her the truth about what happened back there: That when Kirk accused me, I was so angry I said yes. That I'd had an affair with that man at the embassy in Mexico City. He saw a letter he'd written to me: it did sound bad. But it was the man's lovemaking, not mine. I'd met him on a party. And I did let him take me around. But that was all. It infuriated Nancy at the time."

"But you *had* admitted it. What could she expect him to do?"

"I just wanted you to know it now, Steve: not to defend myself for a fool thing. That was all my fault. But Nancy seems to think that if Kirk really loved me, he'd have gone deeper into it. Either *made* me tell the truth, or made the man tell it."

"Who was the man?"

She looked away from him, and her hands twisted together. "It doesn't matter now, Steve."

"Was he in the Army?"

"Oh, no! He was attached down there to a foreign embassy. He just—you know how they are. If an American acted that way— Well, of course, one wouldn't. But foreigners overdo everything with women, especially American women. Very emotional! And it gives the wrong impression."

BREND A clutched the picture of her younger self under her arm, and Steve felt very sorry for her as she took a step toward the door. He started after her, but she stopped him. "I'm going back to Nancy's. Please don't come with me, Steve."

"Wait a minute. You know what we should do? Kirk and you and Nancy and I? Get together and—"

"No, Steve. You saw the way Kirk looked. And Nancy's furious. She saw it. She made me promise I wouldn't go near him." Steve was standing with his back to the front door. She seemed to tremble as she lifted a hand, touched his arm. He hoped she wasn't going to cry again.

"We'll get it all straight, Brenda," he said gently. "Just keep Nancy quiet and leave the rest to me."

She sighed deeply; then she was close to him—without movement, it seemed to him—and her arms were about his neck, her mouth lifted to his.

"Oh, Steve!"

*"There's nothing I want to say—to either of you,"
Kirk Rhule said.*



It was then he heard the familiar scrape of the screen door letting onto the porch. She was still in his arms as he turned his head and saw Kirk Rhule just inside the door, standing there on the porch. He tried to move away from Brenda, but she still clung to him.

Rhule walked straight by them toward the light. He looked into the bedroom, then turned. The light touched his white, finely cut face. His fair hair had rumpled a little over his forehead. It gleamed damp in the light.

"I never would have believed this—unless I had seen it with my own eyes."

Steve switched on the living-room lights.

"Sit down here, Kirk. Don't start going off half-cocked now."

Rhule blinked at the light, looking not at Steve but at Brenda.

"What's that you've got there?" He nodded, and she twisted the picture in her hands, but she made no attempt to show him. He walked closer, looked at it.

"Where'd you find that?"

She was regarding him with steady, strangely calm eyes. But she made no reply.

"Come on, Kirk," Steve Wyatt said quietly. "Sit down. You've got the wrong slant entirely. Listen—"

Kirk Rhule gave him a brief, embarrassed glance, then looked away. "I'm sorry," he said in a low voice. "My fault. I just came in to get something. I'd rather not talk about this, Steve."

"Let's get out of here, Brenda," Steve said. That was the best way. Later, things might be adjusted.

She went with him quietly enough, and angered at her as he was, he had also a perverse sense of having wronged her. Out on the walk she reached for his hand, squeezed it hard.

"I'm beginning to think I told Nancy the truth," she said softly. "Now, please, Steve, go on back to the party."

He watched her walk away and then went slowly back to the Club.

WYATT looked around the still-crowded room. He saw Mallory Thrale, and she met his eyes and smiled at him. He went over to her and asked her to dance. She was very quiet, and he had a wild desire to take her out of there right now, take her back to that bench—tell her all

that had happened to him, and remind her of what had happened to both of them in San Eliséo.

A young lieutenant came over and said: "You're wanted on the telephone, sir. Colonel Rhule."

They stopped dancing. She looked at him quizzically.

"Thank you very much," he said.

"Will you excuse me, Miss Thrale?"

She walked with him to the stairs.

"Work, I suppose?"

"Late code messages, probably. But I hope when I come back—"

She nodded and smiled.

The phone was on the wall in a narrow passage that led to the kitchen.

"Yes?" he said into the mouthpiece.

"This is Rhule. Can you come down to your quarters?"

"Yes, Kirk. Be right along."

Steve wondered. He was a little frightened. He hadn't really known Kirk Rhule for years. And the way he had acted tonight—

The house was lighted as he had left it, Steve noticed, but he saw no sign of life through the yellow light streaming out into the night. Would Brenda be there? Was this to be a quarrel, end of a long friendship?

But Kirk was smoking a pipe quietly enough, and he looked up over a pair of steel-rimmed glasses from a sheaf of radio forms.

"Got something here that just came in. Ought to interest you."

"Yes?" Steve lit a cigarette and sat down, aware of a great relief.

Kirk was even smiling now as he lifted a yellow paper covered with purple typing. "You've got to volunteer, though."

Steve grinned. "In spite of the old Army adage—I'll volunteer. So?"

"Then you leave tomorrow for Carolina. Parachute school. Intensive course. You can select what officers and non-coms you want from your regiment. The rest will carry on with your basic schedule. By the time you get back, we'll be ready to set up here for the jumping. Time's the essence, Steve."

There seemed to be a singing inside Steve Wyatt. Parachute training! Paratroops!

"I'm going to have a drink on this, Kirk!" And he was surprised to hear Kirk Rhule say, almost gayly: "Make me one too, will you? I'll have this all clear for you by then."

They talked for over an hour, working out the details between them. Steve made up his list, and Kirk Rhule told what he knew of paratroops and their training.

"You sure about those men?" Kirk asked once, nodding at the penciled list that Steve was poring over. "You know, they must decide."

"Yes?" Steve grinned. "I know these boys. They'll decide, don't worry."

Kirk smiled his thin smile. "You're a great guy, Steve." And he shook his head in wonder. "Well, I've got to get back up there."

Only then did Steve Wyatt remember that a dance was on, and that Kirk Rhule had a duty to perform. After all, he'd brought Mallory Thrale to the thing. Then he remembered Brenda. *He'd brought her.* He looked up at Kirk. Best get it over and done with.

"About that—when you came in," he said awkwardly.

He noticed how pale Kirk's face was as he stared down at him. But he said quietly:

"You don't have to explain to me, Steve."

He'd heard that once before tonight, and he knew that he did have to explain. If only to himself! He said, evenly:

"I overheard what Nancy told you tonight—about Brenda. I don't know why she said it. It's not true. I saw Brenda only once for a few minutes in San Eliséo. And then she talked mostly about you. Said she'd written to you and you never answered. I didn't even know she was coming here."

A change had come into Rhule's face. A strange change, Steve Wyatt thought. Color had crept in there as he spoke. Rhule said, in a low voice:

"That's true. I simply couldn't—" He looked away then, and Steve felt that he had to say something to close this thing quickly. He said:

"When I came in here—it was to put out the light. I saw it from the walk. Had no idea she was here. She was terribly worked up. . . . Sitting in your bedroom—that picture and all. And being around your things. Familiar things. And out there with me—leaving. It just overcame her for a moment and she started to cry. You know how they are. The man nearest them. A handy shoulder. I just happened to be the guy—as usual. An old friend, a pal of yours."

He looked up, embarrassed, and he was surprised by the look in Kirk Rhule's eyes. It was as though the man were hanging on his every word, pleading with him for more.

"It was that way, Kirk. I know it was."

"I've been praying to God you're right," Kirk Rhule said simply.

"You still love her, Kirk?"

"Yes. It's just something—something I can't help. And I can't talk about it. I thought I had it licked, but I know now—" He turned away, and Steve got up and laid a hand lightly on his shoulder.

"You don't have to, Kirk. Not with me." And the quick, grateful look Kirk Rhule gave him as he left the room warmed his heart. It worried him, too.

CHAPTER EIGHT

STEVE WYATT had little time to remember Fort Comanche for the next three weeks. He flew to the parachute school, and he flew back. And it seemed to him that he was flying all his waking moments. The place fascinated him: the swift sureness of the instruction, the precision of schedule and the following act. Here you were *shown*. Not told! And once you got the hang of the thing, it was all yours, a part of you. Yours to show others: to instill in others as a credo of great pride.

When the moment did come that he stepped from the transport plane onto the dust of the Comanche airfield again, it all came back in a rush. All the people and the familiar places sprang into his mind's eye before he actually saw them. But almost at once he did see the Vances, the faces of many of his officers who had been left behind, and Kirk Rhule. They were glad to see him, to listen to his eager stories. They were all ready to go, Kirk said.

He didn't see Mallory Thrale. He wondered if she were still at the Post. Maybe bored and gone by this time; but he dared not ask. Why should he? Later, though, he knew she was still here.

He saw her now and then on the walk, at the Post exchange, but she

was always with someone. She spoke to him calmly enough, not smiling, but not as though any real enmity existed between them. There wasn't much time to think of that, these days. Never in all his service had so many changes occurred in so short a time on any Army Post he had known. A year seemed to have passed in weeks. Engineers and gangs of laborers all over the place. Tanks, trucks, wicked little howitzers moving from chaotic snarls into an even, martial pattern. The horses were gone; their stables were filled with strange objects. Hangars were going up almost overnight.

One thing that fascinated Steve was the intricate physical training course that had been built across the river, up into the nearest hills. Every day the men went through it: bare to the waist, their muscled brown bodies flashed through the trees, rolled and leaped over the obstacles.

You started high up, jumped from a twenty-foot embankment. You ran, weaving like a ball-carrying back through a maze of ugly stumps; you climbed walls, sprang across ditches. You snaked up dangling ropes, bent double as you squirmed through rows of sewer pipes. You went hand-over-hand across the river.

On a level spot by the river they had what was called a "mock-up." It was a high platform, and you dangled, slid from it in a harness. That was the first step in the parachute training. Then there was the "mock-up" dummy plane. You jumped from that, turned as you fell into the pit of sawdust below, came up to your feet like a brisk tumbler.

The Texas boys liked all this. Hardly a word had been said about the horses. No time for that! Gone were their high boots and shining spurs: in their place was the short, rugged boot of the parachutist. And gone, too, were the tilted campaign hats. In their place was the cocky khaki hat with its proud new insignia. If anything, there was even more swagger about them as they walked through the small town, cast proud glances at the passing motorists on the highway. They were the Rangers from Texas now: many of them with the high heritage of the old and desperate Texas Rangers of another day. They knew it, didn't talk about it; but by their carriage and their eyes made all who saw aware of it.

Few of the men had transferred. Several old-timers, a less adventurous youngster here and there. But not many. And the new spirit bound those who stayed with a glowing new sense of camaraderie.

"I told you, sir," old Sweeney said to Steve one day, "how it would be with them."

"You haven't leaped out of any planes yet," Steve grinned.

"But we will. And ride in them like we was on a fire engine."

And soon enough they did.

Steve knew he never would forget that first day as they sat, quiet, very still and with unmoving faces, in the big, trembling plane. Most of them had never been in a plane before. But they sat there, knowing in a few minutes all of them would be gone—gone into nothingness, with these bulking things on their bodies their only guarantee that they would reach the sunny ground below alive.

Steve watched them as they sat in the plane—watched the still faces. There was no talk. A few were chewing gum, and that made their faces move a little. The jump-master took his post; the men stood in line, very close. The door was open. The flashing blue of the sky poured by. The cable above them moved, became taut.

"Jump!"

Steve's first thought was of sheep-shearing. The annoyed, newly clipped sheep, released from their indignity,

Billy Pitman had said: "I want to get in the suicide platoon. Jump right next to the Major."

allowed to run from the shearing-shed. One went leaping over the low fence, the others hurrying behind it.

But these men weren't sheep. They were the cream of the young men of his country, and he felt that strange lump in his throat as he moved toward the blue sky, never once a thought in himself that he too would be dangling in nothingness in a few short seconds.

That first jump with his own men did something to him. For once and for all it took the fetish of the horse from him. The horse had been exciting. This wasn't exciting; it transcended all excitement. It gave you the thrill of excitement without the breathlessness, the chaos of thought; the impossibility of savoring that excitement at the time of its action.

When the chute had opened and he got his bearings, he looked around: took in the great picture with the backdrop of that incredibly blue and beautiful sky. He saw his men, strung out, floating below the rounded whiteness of the lazily swaying chutes.

The General had jumped that day too; and when they landed, they were close together and a smile passed between them.

"How did it go?"

"Fine, sir."

A youngster, barely eighteen, Steve thought, stood close to the General.



*Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley*

His young blue eyes were dancing. The General, the President himself would not have awed him at this high moment. Steve almost thought he was going to slap the General on the back.

"Doggone! Know how I felt?"

"I'd like to know," the General said.

"First—up there, like waiting for the dentist. Knowing I had to have it out. And that dope needle. And now she's out. I feel real good."

"The hell of it is," Steve thought, "maybe that novocain's going to wear off on some of them!"

Vance's regiment was training with the big transport planes and the gliders. Back at the airdrome they were even now warming up for their first flight.

"Like to go with me, Wyatt, and see the show?" General Thrale asked.

"I would, sir."

They got into a waiting staff car, leaving the second in command to get the men into the trucks. It was an inspiring sight that met them, all those giant planes lined up on the big field which, such a short time before, had been a cavalry drill-ground.

Steve stood with the General and Kirk Rhule, watching trucks race up, disgorge their compact fighting units. Watching the men form up by their planes, and at the word, march briskly aboard. Here too, few of them had ever been this close to a plane. But they went up the ramps, took their places as calmly as though stepping to the heel-posts at stables.

"Next time," Kirk said happily, "they'll have the jeeps, guns and everything. This is just to give them the feel of it. They'll land back here after the ride."

The General had gone over to get into the command plane with Vance. Steve said:

"You've done a wonderful staff job on this, Kirk. It seems incredible."

Kirk was pleased. He nodded toward the leading plane.

"There's the guy. He gets things done. In a few days we'll have every bit of our equipment. But you gave us the men, Steve. Look at them!"

THEY watched the planes roar off, take up formation against the blue of the sky. Cars from the post turned, started back by them. Everybody had turned out to see the show, it seemed. Nancy Vance stopped close to them, sounded her horn.

"Wasn't that a sight! My poor darling gone off into the blue! You want a ride in?"

Steve looked from Nancy's pert face to Kirk Rhule's. They were both smiling, had buried the hatchet by now, for Kirk had been to the Vances' for dinner, later had taken Brenda to the movies, and since then had been a nightly caller. He had said little to Steve, except for that first night. He came back a different man. For the first time since he'd been in the Post, he was whistling. There was color in his face. And he had said to Steve:

"Everything's fine—I think. But I don't want to kill my luck by talking about it."

"Good," Steve had said, and let it go at that. He had never liked to mess in other people's business. He had said nothing to Nancy Vance. And she had been her old cheerful self with him.

Kirk said now: "I've got an official car out, Nancy. And I've got some work to do. But Steve, here, has put in a good day."

"Well, you come, Steve. Because little Joe's got the measles. And he's wild to see you. To hear about that jump."



"I never would have believed this, unless I had seen it with my own eyes."

They had little Joe in bed—officially. But when Steve went upstairs, he was halfway from the open window, going fast.

"I had to watch Daddy. You won't tell, Steve?" he begged as he jumped into bed.

"Not this time. Did you see him?"

"In the front plane. But they had everything closed and I couldn't see his face."

Steve saw the field-glasses tucked against the window screen. The poor kid!

"Tell me about the parachute jump, Steve. Did it feel like you were turning over and over?"

"No. Not much like anything."

"Did you land in prickly pear?"

"I just missed. But one of the men did."

"Sergeant Sweeney?"

"He lit in a mesquite. Worsel!"

"Did he swear a lot?"

"Not for him."

He sat on a chair by the bed and talked with the kid. He was amazed at how like Joe Vance he was. He remembered Joe as a raw country kid his first year at West Point. Joe had this same stiff red hair, the same incredible freckles, the same wistful grin.

NANCY called up the stairs after a while. "Time's up, Steve."

"All right. I'm coming."

"Steve—" The big brown eyes, Nancy's eyes, were staring up at him.

"Sure. What?"

"Aunt Brenda—she's gone up to San Elisco."

"For good?"

"Oh, she's coming back. But she got something for me. I know she did, when she was across the line in Mexico the other day. She always does when they go shopping, so I know. But she went off in a hurry, before I was awake. She must have forgot to give it to me."

"What am I supposed to do?"

The kid grinned ingratiatingly. "Get it for me. You can tell it because you know that funny kind of Mexican paper it'll be in."

"You mean: search her room?"

"Aw, Steve, she wouldn't mind! I heard her tell Mom you were the greatest guy ever lived. Something like that. And I know it's one of those Mexican horses with the saddle and bridle with silver and all."

"What would your mother say?"

"Nothing, if you did it. I gave her my word I wouldn't leave the room. I wouldn't dare ask her. She'd say how did I know, and I had a terrible nerve."

"Well, how did you know?"

Little Joe closed one eye carefully, and Steve let it go at that. "I've stooged for all the others," he thought, "so here goes for little Joe." Bren-

da's room, he was informed, was right across the hall. He slid quietly through the unlocked door and into the room. It was a pleasant guest-room, and like everything about Nancy Vance's house, was cheerful and tidy.

A bureau faced him as he came into the room, and on it he noticed at once the two pictures: the one of Kirk as a second lieutenant, and the picture of Brenda he remembered so vividly from that night of trouble. Side by side the pictures stood, as they had in the old days, and Steve drew near and stared at them. He wondered. So she had kept his picture through the years, as he had kept hers. But why hadn't he asked her for the other one back? Now that "everything was fine"?

For some reason he picked up the picture of Brenda—maybe to get a better look at those strange, fascinating eyes. As he did so, the retaining back of faded velvet came unfastened, flapped down, and a paper dropped out.

He picked it up and saw that it was a letter. It was written in a bold hand, broad blue strokes. At the top, staring at him, was the salutation: "My darling!"

Nothing old and faded about this. And not from Kirk. As he held it, a little frightened, unsure what to do, he saw that it was dated only two days before.

Well. . . . Brenda had been living in a world of men, naturally, all these years. A woman like that could not escape meeting them, stirring them; maybe even loving them. Some of them. One of them? This looked like it.

But what about Kirk and the new—the "everything fine" business? That sounded as though she had given him reason to hope, at least. Had she gone to San Eliséo to tell this man that? Or—just to see this man and not to tell him?

"Maybe I could find out if I read this letter," Steve Wyatt thought.

"Steve Wyatt!"

Nancy must have come up the back stairs, and he hadn't heard her until that call, close, almost outside the door. There was no time to fumble with the picture back. Caught at such a thing would be awkward. The door was open, she would be at it in a second.

Steve thrust the letter into his shirt, turned just in time to meet Nancy Vance's indignant eyes.

He grinned at her, whispered hurriedly what he was after. "I felt sorry for the poor kid. Don't blame him. will you?"

"He'll wait now till tomorrow before he gets it," she said grimly. Then she laughed. "Between you and Bren-

da, you'll ruin him. I've got it in my closet."

He laughed, relieved. "You can't blame the kid for trying."

"What do you think about Kirk and Brenda?" she said, and he noticed that she was looking at the framed pictures on the dresser.

"What about them?"

"Hasn't he told you?" As she spoke, she straightened the embroidered cover on the dresser, noticed the unlatched back of the picture and almost absently replaced it. It seemed simply the instinctive act of a tidy person, but he held his breath for a moment as he watched her face. Had she seen him take that letter out? He didn't think so, for she went on, without change of expression:

"Well, I suppose he's sensitive about it still. Wants to be sure. But I can tell you *she* is. And when she gets back, I think they'll announce it. Get married right away. It just makes me believe there's some good in me, anyway, Steve."

She gave him a quick, warm smile. "You're not sore at my using you as a decoy?"

"I was. Still, as long as I didn't get full of shot—"

She laughed. "Come on down and I'll give you a drink."

And Steve Wyatt thought, later: "I'll burn this thing in my shirt, unread. What I don't know won't hurt me; or Kirk."

STEVE had kept his two private mounts. He couldn't bring himself to part with his horses until the last minute, when he would leave here for good; go on to the great adventure. Every day he got in a little riding, unless they were out of the Post on a hike. Usually he would get up an hour before reveille to make it; often after dinner he would take the second horse out.

One day the General asked him if he wanted to sell the little mare.

"My daughter likes to ride, and you seem to have a corner on the horse-flesh at the Post." And he smiled.

That was true. All the other officers except Joe Vance had long since sold their mounts for what they could get to neighboring ranchers.

"I'd be glad to let Miss Thrale use the mare as much as she likes. I'm hard put to it to keep them both exercised."

That was agreed on, but she had never sent for the mare, and Steve decided that it was one of those obligations she didn't care to incur from him, at any rate. He met her by the Post exchange one noon and walked toward her quarters with her.

"Don't you like my little mare?"

"I do, very much. I've been down to look at her often."

"I told your father I'd be glad to have you ride her."

"You won't sell her?"

She looked away from him as he turned to watch her, wondering at the strange wariness of this girl. "I've promised her to a rancher friend when we go. She needs exercise. I haven't the time. It would be a favor—to her," he urged.

She looked at him then. "Really?"

"Honestly."

"It's very nice of you," she said more easily. "In that case—"

They had reached her house and had stopped at the entrance walk.

"Miss Thrale?"

"Yes?" The fine brows had gone up; the word came out in that cool, impersonal voice.

She was watching him, waiting, and he noticed that more color had come into her face. He said, clumsily:

"It wasn't anything. Just wondering."

"Wondering about what?"

It wasn't what he was wondering about, but it came into his mind readily and he said quickly:

"A few things about the mare. You know, I've had her a long time—broke and schooled her. If you like, I'll go along with you when you take her out the first time. Providing, of course,"—he grinned,—“you'll be willing to get up in the middle of the night. I have to work all day."

"I wouldn't mind that," she said. She didn't smile, but—a little more, and she would have. He felt better. On a horse he could talk—think better. Maybe out there, free of all these tangled things and people, he might at least get back some of the friendliness that seemed once to have been possible between them.

"When would you like to go? Tomorrow?"

He thought a moment, then remembered. "The other regiment is having its first big attack problem tomorrow. Opens up at daylight. We'd be blown sky high: land mines, howitzers, dive bombers. . . . The whole reservation will be a madhouse."

"I want to see that!"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be possible."

"I see. Secret. And I—" She gave him a look that he didn't like, and he wondered, hurt: "Why should I get blamed?" Then she nodded brusquely, turned toward the house, and the best he could do was to nod back. If she wanted to see special training like that, let her ask her father. He was the one who made the rules here.

Steve met her father the next morning before the light came. He was in a jeep on a high crest, from where he could see the beginning of the attack in the small valley below. Steve dismounted and turned his horse over to his orderly and stood by the jeep.

Kirk was there, and several other staff officers.

The General stared at Steve in the dimness, acknowledged his salute.

"Wyatt?"

"Yes sir?"

"I hope this goes well. If it does, we'll put the whole attack on, possibly next week. As soon as your unit goes through its part. Just a matter of combining them then—with the rough edges off."

Steve slung his field-glasses around his neck, stared off across the river to the high plateau beyond. Somewhere in the dark below him, spread in the mesquite, were Joe Vance's men, already on their line of departure.

WHEN the show opened, they would have the river to cross, forbidding cliffs beyond to scale. The presumption was that they had come this far forward in gliders, landed swiftly and reorganized in the plain behind this slope and had made their way to their present position preparatory to the attack. His own men—simulated this time—long since had parachuted far to the front, were even now making a surprise landing at the hostile airfield.

As he stared toward the far plateau, a sheaf of star-shells broke high and bright against the heavens. He watched their graceful course, fascinated, stirred with strange excitement. Then came the distant crash of explosives, the sudden color of flame against the far sky. His detail on the enemy landing-field was at work on schedule. He looked at his watch, though he knew that the timing would be to the second, with old Sweeney in charge of the party. He could imagine the old man as the charges went off, as the haystacks they had set out were touched with flame. He could hear his gruff, satisfied curses as the simulated Nazi airfield felt the avenging hand. It would be better yet when they actually landed there and went through facsimile installations with the whole regiment.

Below in the shallow valley the covering guns broke out in a quick, sharp chorus. The bright streaks from their muzzles were vicious spits against the dark desert. Far beyond, along and over the edge of the cliff crest, their shells burst, wickedly bright.

The attack was on. And with it came the quick, soft Texas morning light.

Steve watched through his glasses. Now he could see the shadowy, eager figures of the men working their way from cover to cover toward the river. Machine-guns beat out a steady cadence for them; there were sharp, sporadic bursts from the automatic arms, the hard barks of the little cannon beating at hostile pillboxes.

From nowhere came the rush and whine of the supporting dive bombers. They were like flashing hawks as they ripped the hostile position with their guns, left it a smother of dust from their bombs. The clear light of the morning sky was gone, eclipsed by the dull hanging haze from the cliff top.

Staring through his glasses, shaking a little from the thrill of it all, Steve Wyatt felt a hand on his arm.

"Are they, real? Those shells and bombs?"

He lowered the glasses. Mallory Thrale was standing by him and the hand on his arm was shaking. Brenda Adamson was with her, and she smiled brightly.

"What a sight!" she said. She handed Mallory the heavy glasses she held. "Take a look." They must have ridden out together, then.

Steve saw his mare and Vance's horse, held by an orderly. Well, her father was here. It was up to him. He saw General Thrale glance their way, and then Kirk Rhule came over. He took Brenda by the arm. Steve watched the glow in his eyes as he looked at her. And he wondered about these two women being here together.

"Hello, Kirk," Brenda said, and she moved close against him. "Joe Vance said you'd probably be up here. Miss Thrale said her father told her it would be all right if we came out. Gee, I'd like to be in one of those dive bombers. Look at them!"

The dive bombers were swooping so close to the ground that it seemed to Steve that some of them were bound to crash. But they swept up like swallows, and one of them turned, roared over their heads and the pilot waved down at them.

"You'd better not go beyond here," Kirk said. "Keep an eye on them, will you, Steve?"

"That's not my job," Steve Wyatt thought, and somehow the implication angered him. He knew he could see all there was to see from here, as far as the big picture went, but he wanted to get down with the men, watch them at work, see the inner, human element of this thing as he must know it for what lay ahead.

He made no answer, and Mallory Thrale looked at him quickly.

"Major Wyatt has already told me that this isn't for such as us," she said crisply.

Brenda laughed. "Oh, come now, Steve!" She turned to Mallory Thrale. "That's just his gruff soldier stuff. I know him of old. He's proud as Punch of all this—eager to explain it. Please, Steve! And then, when you've let us in on it all, you can go your way."

"It's an interesting problem," Kirk said happily. "Give them the low-

down, Steve, like a good guy. I've got to be off with the General."

He gave Brenda's arm an affectionate tug and left them. They watched him get in the car and drive off.

"Look!" Brenda exclaimed, pointing. "Those men by the river. What are those things?"

In spite of himself, Steve Wyatt relented. He was as excited as Brenda as he watched the rushing groups race for the river-bank, covered by a furious blast of protective fire.

"Rubber boats. Watch how they take them across."

"But they'll be hurt!" Now Mallory Thrale had seized his arm, her fingers tight.

Rearranged mines were exploding in the river, throwing great brown plumes of water high into the air.

"That's part of the game," Brenda said. She spoke so coolly, so surely, that Steve glanced at her. Kirk's coaching, he thought, and maybe a bit of showing off.

"Game?" Mallory Thrale said, and Steve noticed that she had turned away, that her face had gone white. He said: "Not much harm in them. They're controlled. Mostly for realism. Now and then they'll lift a boat, that's all."

THE boats were in the river now, their occupants fiercely driving them toward the opposite shore.

"What are the big fires—away over there?" Brenda asked, her eyes eager. He explained the job that Sweeney and his detail were doing, and then drew their attention to the engineers readying their bridges in a deep arroyo off to one flank. "When they get them over, tanks can cross. You'll see them in a minute."

"But the men," Mallory said, "in those boats. What are they carrying?"

"You'll see," Steve said, forgetting his reluctance now. "Ropes with hooks. Scaling ladders. Watch them go up that cliff."

Mallory Thrale turned full on him. "They're sending those men up there? With all that stuff falling?"

"Why not? You read about Dicppe, didn't you? There were cliffs there."

She said nothing, and he saw that Brenda was watching him curiously. He wondered what she thought. But since that night of trouble, he had only talked to her a few times and she had made no reference to it.

"Yes, Mallory," she said now. "If the British had been as prepared as these men when they attacked Norway—with all those cliffs and fjords and things. What if a few men do fall? Isn't it better than to have them shot to pieces trying to find a trail up?"

"That's more or less the idea," Steve said. "Look!"

A large, dark, textured illustration of a cliff face. A bridge is visible, and a person is falling from it. The scene is dramatic and action-packed.

The boats were across now, and selected leaders were working their way up the cliff with their ropes dangling behind them. The whole crest of the cliff was a rolling cloud of dust; bits of rocks, brush, mats of dirt showered down the cliff face.

"Oh!" Mallory Thrale gasped, and she swayed against Steve, dropping the glasses from her eyes. Through the dust Steve saw the distant man shudder from the blow of the plunging rock, start to fall, once more get a grip on some tenuous hold, and then at last lose forever what chance he had. His body struck twice before it was lost at last to sight in the weed-grown rocks at the base of the cliff.

Steve put a steadying arm about Mallory Thrale. But he kept his eyes on the rushing scene before him. The engineers were racing their mobile bridge across the river, the far, dark, dust-covered men were still moving steadily up the great cliff; wounded or simulated wounded were already coming back with stretcher-bearers to the aid station. Some of the crews of the rubber boats were already fanning out along the cliff base to cover the flanks, and later to work their way up to the high plateau by trails, easier paths. The bridge, almost across, suddenly ripped high into the air, was lost to sight in a mighty upthrust of water.

"Look at them *swimming*," Brenda said calmly. "And with all that equipment on."

Men were swimming, all right. Brown, bobbing dots fighting to cross, their arms, as they had been taught, held high and relentlessly against the water's reach.

"Good boys!" Steve said. "I hope to God my men do as well at their job."

"Some of them may *drown*," Mallory Thrale said in a low, husky voice. She looked straight into Steve's eyes, and he had to meet that look. Her face was very pale. And very beautiful, he thought.

"Why don't you two ride back?" he asked, and he was surprised at the softness in his own voice.

That first jump with his men did something for Steve. Once and for all it took the fetish of the horse from him.

"We can take it," Brenda said easily.

"It—it isn't a matter of *taking* it," Mallory Thrale said quietly. There was a sort of proud look about her, and Steve Wyatt had a sudden desire to draw her pale face against him. "I know it's necessary," she went on in a low voice. "But those boys—those kids. It's just—" She turned her head away sharply, as though without hope of any understanding from them.

"I understand," he said.

"No, you don't!" she said with quick harshness. "You're part of it. I'm not. I just stand here and gape at it. Safe and soft and spectator-comfortable. Why should anybody be that way, with things as they are? I'm old enough. I've had all the good things this country has to offer. I'm big and strong and healthy. Why should I be exempted from chances these eighteen- and nineteen-year-old kids take? Why?"

There were tears in her eyes now, and Brenda reached for her arm.

"Come on, Mallory. Let's go back."

"No. I'm going to stay here. And I'm going to—" She turned from them, motioned to the horse orderly.

Steve saw there was no use in arguing, saying anything to this girl. She mounted up, her face stiff, her eyes set far beyond them. He and Brenda

mounted after her. "I'm into this, I guess," he thought. "As usual, Kirk was right. I'm stooging again."

He rode silently beside her. The wounded and the simulated wounded were coming in fast now, and he noted that she had spotted the red cross on the aid-station fly. The attack had gone on, but shells from the howitzers behind them screamed steadily overhead. "I hope we don't get a short burst in here," Steve was thinking. "Or some other damned thing. It would be just my luck."

In these problems they broke the rules of warfare to bring badly wounded men back expeditiously. So the boy who had crashed in that fall down the cliff was already across the river when they reached the valley floor. His eyes were screwed tight shut with pain. But they opened as he was set tenderly down, and he stared straight up at Steve Wyatt.

"How do you feel, Pitman?"

"Okay, Major."

He had been in Steve's regiment, but had transferred to Vance's. He asked for the change, he said, because his twin brother and he were always being mixed up. Buddy and Billy Pitman: which was which? There had been a lot of confusion over it, but from the looks of this kid, not for much longer.

Mallory Thrale had asked the medical officer, and Steve could see by her face. She bent over the trooper, smoothed the rough hair from his wet forehead and spoke to him quietly. The kid looked up at her, his eyes wide open, but he didn't say a word. When they put him in the ambulance, she climbed in with him; Steve could see the brightness of tears in her eyes as she bent down to say something to Buddy Pitman.

He stood and watched the ambulance move off, then remounted his horse. The sounds of mock battle still roared about him, but what he had just seen gave it a realism not to be denied. He saw Brenda Adamson sitting her horse now, calmly watching him. Obviously she had remained at a distance, and now she was alert only to the present.

She said coolly: "How was it? Not as bad as it looked, I suppose."

"Why do you say that? You saw him fall."

She shrugged. "It never is," she said carelessly.

"It is, this time," he said, and he closed his legs on his mount, and she trailed, trotting after him. . . .

Buddy Pitman died that night in the station hospital. His brother was there, keeping up a brave front until he was led from the room into the dimly lit corridor. He was a tough youngster, and Steve remembered the adult savagery of his face one day at

bayonet practice. But it was a boy's face now, pale, loose-mouthed, and the young eyes were full of stricken wonder.

Mallory Thrale walked with him, her arm about him; as a mother would move, comfort a desperately shocked child. Steve could hear the few low words, more the sound of her voice than the meaning of the words, and his heart seemed to swell in him at the glory of pity, patient tenderness in her deep, warm eyes.

Later he walked with her to her quarters. She was very quiet, but she had slipped a hand through his arm. He felt that she was leaning on him now, and glancing at her white face, he realized the awful weariness these last hours had brought to her.

They stopped at her walk, and she held out her hand.

"Thank you," she said simply. "I needed you—badly, at the end there."

He had an almost unbearable desire to take her in his arms; hold her close against him, stroke soothingly that soft, smooth hair.

"Thank you," he said. "You made it easier for the kid. The next best thing to his mother."

Her eyes brightened a little and she said breathlessly:

"Yes, he said that, didn't he? Thank God I was there."

She turned then, and seemed to hurry as she went toward the steps.

CHAPTER NINE

THEY held funeral services for Buddy Pitman before his broken body was escorted with all military honors to the train. There was no father, it seemed, but the mother had been sent for at the small north Texas town from which they came. The small, still chapel was crowded. Outside, the overflow waited: the escort, the draped caisson, the band.

The flag-draped coffin stood there before the bowed heads. The chaplain in his robes prayed slowly. He spoke of Buddy Pitman, softly, his words stirring the heavy hearts below him; lightening some of those hearts with the promise that this one boy had gone, as others would go, for something finer, something more decent, more glorious than men often died for. It was a sacrifice in battle, just as much as the later sacrifices across the water would be.

In the dim church, motes floated in the light from the high Texas sun. There was the heavy odor of flowers; and Steve Wyatt, lifting his eyes, saw the proud offering young Buddy's mates had arranged for him. It was in the form of an airplane—a few months ago it would have been a horseshoe. Steve knew.

He saw Mallory Thrale. She stood with her father, her eyes lifted, her lovely face very pale, the high light touching the brightness of her hair, halo-like. He felt a sudden deep burning in him—a great pride, too. That flag-draped coffin, that girl with her lifted head, the eyes shining; the chaplain in his robes, with his deep, tender voice; the tall, still-faced General with the ribbons of past campaigns bright on his chest. All these young men, their eyes deep now with sorrow, their young minds soberly considering their loss, the first of many to be, in the service of their country.

Steve saw Buddy Pitman's mother. She was in a front pew with her boy. She was a frail, bent woman dressed in ancient black. On her stringy gray hair was draped a faded black shawl. Steve could see the edge of her thin brown face: it was as sharp, as still against the background of the chapel wall, as though carved from a wooden post.

The boy beside her stood very straight. He wore his best cotton uniform: it was stiff with starch, and on the wide chest there was a gleam from the polished expert badges.

Steve had not been listening, he realized, for some time to what the chaplain was saying. But he must have said something now that touched a hidden, nerve-raw thing in that silent woman.

She screamed suddenly, and the echo of that scream seemed to shake the walls of the tiny place.

Mallory Thrale reached her first, even before her son, so expertly swift at drill, but now so helplessly still. Steve led the brother down the aisle, to the rear of the chapel.

"You'd better go along with her, Billy."

"I don't know how she come to do it, Major. But she's taken that way sometimes. Since an outlaw horse kilt Daddy. I feel real ashamed."

"You go with her, boy. There's nothing to be ashamed of. I'll take care of your furlough."

He watched the boy stumble toward the bright light outside, and then quietly went back to his place. The chaplain was talking slowly, in his low stirring voice, and all eyes were back on his shining face.

Later, Mallory Thrale faced her father, in the living-room of their quarters. He sat quietly, eying her as she talked, and then waited a long time before he answered.

"You know it's absurd to ask such a thing, Mallory."

"I don't see why. All those men jump. As a matter of routine. I'd like to do it once—with them. Somehow it would make me feel more—"

He said soothingly: "That funeral has upset you."

"This idleness, you mean. In a place where everybody is working, taking risks, while I—"

"Just the act of doing something dangerous doesn't make for usefulness."

"I know. But it would—well, be sort of like a penance. Don't you see?"

"I see," he said, smiling soberly. "I understand. But I'm afraid it'll have to be no. In any event, Wyatt's the officer in charge. It would be his say so. What about Wyatt, anyway?"

"Wyatt? You mean: let's change the subject?"

"Well, he seems a nice chap," he said, smiling. "Good soldier. You're friendly, aren't you? And he commands the paratroops."

"Wyatt?" she said, as though pondering the word, frowning.

"You don't like him?"

She shrugged. "You're all of a pattern. He'd say no, as you well know."

HE smiled at the sudden anger in her eyes.

"How about this Miss Adamson? She's been down here visiting a long time. Seems to get around a lot. I've noticed Kirk is giving her some attention."

"Kirk is going to marry her," she said, with a quick look of satisfaction for the shock she thought this would be to him.

"Marry her?"

"You thought I had Kirk in mind, perhaps?"

"I knew you liked him, of course; I—I couldn't conceive of you marrying anyone but a soldier, Mallory."

"And I hope you can't conceive of me marrying anyone but a soldier I love," she said quietly.

"Naturally not," he said, and he thought that perhaps deep in her was bitterness because of this, bitterness that had brought on this recent unrest in her. He said: "I just got an order by phone. I'm flying to Washington. You'd better come along. See your mother, your friends. Get a bit of change—"

"No," she said. "This is my place. But while you're up there—" Her eyes clouded, and he noticed the twisting of her mouth that he knew so well. "Lately I've been thinking a lot about those nurses on Bataan. There can't be anything worse—or prouder, for women in the world, than what happened to those girls, and the way they took it. It makes me ashamed, doing so little. While you're up there, you can get me in this Army nurse reserve—or Red Cross. I've taken all the courses. I should be qualified. I want to go across with the rest of you, Daddy."

He watched her somber young face, and the heart in him beat heavily.

"You'd better come with me. Your mother—"

"No," she said. "Not after—Buddy Pitman. Those nurses—remembering them. I admit I forced my way down here—for a change. Perhaps from mere curiosity. To see the sights of the Border. Well, I've seen them. I saw the flag on that poor little coffin. And I—" She shook herself, tried to smile. "Isn't this sort of sudden? These orders? Does it mean something big?"

"I think so," he said.

"Mother writes the talk in Washington is all second front. So it's that, of course. Where will it be? Norway? Lots of people think so."

He lit a cigarette, carefully drew in the smoke, let it out slowly. She waited, watching him, but saw that he meant to say nothing.

"They say the France talk is just to fool the Germans," she persisted.

"Who says? The armchair strategists?" He smiled humoringly.

"Who knows? They may be serving a useful purpose. Brenda Adamson says Spain. I suppose her guess is as good as any."

"Mallory—"

"Yes?"

"I want you to remember this," he said soberly. "I allowed you to come down here against my better judgment. And you remember the talk we had at that time. I don't want you to discuss war topics. You might make some idle guess that later might turn out to be close and be attributed to me. I don't mind you watching the problems: they're just technique, and you're in the Army—a part of it. In a way. You come from a soldier family, and the stuff is in your blood. But—"

"I won't, Daddy," she said quietly, and she smiled at him. He thought it was like the kid smile she used to give him with her childhood promises.

Steve Wyatt flew out to the High Mesa with the air force commander attached for training purposes. They used one of the small artillery liaison and reconnaissance planes, and it dropped them lightly as a bird at the contemplated scene of the coming parachute attack. Steve's men had already made their practice landing, their simulated seizure of the hostile airdrome here: tomorrow was to be the big show. The combined operation.

Vance's regiment was to make the attack, as on that day when Buddy Pitman was killed. But avoiding the errors the critique of that action had stressed! He too was to repeat: the two halves were to be pieced craftily into the hoped-for perfect military pattern: the surprise capture of a hostile airdrome. . . . They got into a waiting jeep and rode over the place.

Steve stared about him, impressed. The engineers had been at work here, and the job they had done seemed a miracle. From the air the buildings, runways, the camouflaged installations were completely realistic. From the ground, close up, the artifice was pretty convincing, too. Here, made of light wood, papier-mâché, artfully painted canvas, was the full-scale replica of the model he and his men had been studying, plotting, for a week.

"Actual duplicate of a German airdrome," the Colonel said. "What do you think?"

"If you can drop us a little better than you did in practice—"

The Colonel looked up at the clear blue sky. "With this weather, we can drop you on a dime."

On the practice day there had been quite a wind, and some of Steve's groups had landed awkwardly dispersed, his own command group among them. Invaluable seconds had been lost in the subsequent timing and organization for special movement.

WALKING over the ground, Steve marked down objectives, mentally arranging his attacking groups for each. It would be dark, and they must land, organize swiftly, make unerringly for the designated spots. Machine-guns must go into action at selected targets: must be set up to cover ground from which hostile reinforcements might come; squads with tommy-guns, with grenades, must rush defending personnel, kill their spirit, panic them with the violence of surprise aggressive action.

A command post must be set up at once. Orders must be issued in accordance with unexpected situations. Messages must go back by radio, by flare, to keep Vance's men informed of the progress of the attack, to make possible their combination of effort at the right spot, the right time. And then, when the place was taken, locally improvised repairs must be made on the runways, obstacles removed so that ready transport planes could land safely, overwhelmingly.

"Looks as if someone had in mind an airfield near the sea," the Colonel said. "The other regiment attacking from so close."

"It does, at that," Steve said. "They didn't give out a general situation, so that's anybody's guess. Probably, though, it's just for the technique. No strategical significance."

The air officer looked at him curiously. "These days, though. . . . Time is short. They often cut the cloth to fit. Noticed that?"

"If you mean: have I any secret dope—no," Steve said, grinning. "You have been overseas in action already. You know more than I'd ever imagine."

"That's right," the Colonel said thoughtfully. "I was thinking about some of those raids we made with the British. They're very thorough. You know—at Dieppe?"

"Were you there?"

The Colonel nodded. "We had it down cold before we started—weeks before. I only hope they let me go over with you fellows. I've got a hunch—" He shrugged. "Well, the General gets back today, doesn't he? He'll know, at any rate."

"I suppose so," Steve said. "But that doesn't mean *we* will."

THEY were sitting in the car, smoking, and the Colonel waved his cigarette toward a sprawled ruin of a building, partly hidden by a grove of live-oaks some half mile away, in the direction of the county road.

"Odd-looking thing to be out here in this wilderness. Looks as if it might have been quite impressive in its time. Built of rocks instead of the faithful 'dobe. Tile roof, even if it is a bit saggy. Must have been some nut, to go to all that expense to live in this wilderness."

"Let's take a look at it," Steve said. He drove the jeep over to the house, and then through high weeds and in through a broken, moss-encrusted gateway. There had been an asphalt drive once, but it was cracked and weed-grown now. A crazily tilted well roof, green-tiled, reared out of the choking brush; the wooden bucket still hung, rotted, moldy, on its rusty chain.

"Stained glass windows and everything!" the Colonel said. "Why, this is great! Nice place for a poker game—or a ghost. *Is that a ghost?*"

He was pointing, and Steve saw a flutter of white on the sagging porch. They got out of the car. Brenda Adamson was standing by the open front door, and she was smiling. She turned and called out, and Steve saw a movement in the hall behind her.

"Welcome to the ruins," Brenda said. "Steve! How are you, Colonel?"

"A very lovely ghost," the Colonel said. "What's cooking here?"

Steve saw Mallory Thrale then. She stood just inside the house and looked at them. She wore a tweed skirt and a beige sweater, and she looked very tall and handsome.

"Mallory's showing me over the old homestead," Brenda said. She stood there, very voluptuous-looking in a white jersey suit, and Ames looked her over appreciatively.

Mallory came out, smiling pleasantly enough. She said, "What's going on?" and looked curiously at Steve.

Ames said: "Steve and I have a small bet. You see the edge of those trees? That circular hollow?"

Mallory nodded.

"I'm betting Steve that we can drop him within a hundred yards either way in the clear."

"Drop him?" Mallory said, looking from Ames to Wyatt.

"So's he wouldn't break an egg."

"Just the two of you playing games?" Brenda asked brightly.

"War games. I'll pilot that plane myself."

"You'd better be right," Steve said, grinning. "The General will probably bail out at my side—if he gets back by tonight. I'd hate to have the two of us land in that high tree there."

"My father?" Mallory said in a strange voice.

Steve nodded. "In this problem, he's coming with me. To see at first hand."

She turned away and stared out over the bright mesa.

Ames said: "How about showing me around this chateau, Miss Adamson?"

"If you'll tell me all," Brenda said gayly, and she took his arm and pulled him with her into the house.

Mallory Thrale glanced sidewise at Steve Wyatt. "Is that really what's going to happen?"

She turned steady eyes on him. "Actually—it's as dangerous as if you were in real war."

"The first part, yes."

"And some of the rest, too. As with Buddy Pitman."

He looked away from her uncomfortably; then he said quietly:

"His brother Billy was talking to me the other day. He told me what you did—about the mother."

She turned on him almost angrily. "What do you mean?"

"I knew, of course, that you'd gone up home with her after the funeral. He told me about the house."

She said nothing. They stood in silence, and he remembered Billy Pitman's eager eyes that day. Billy had told of the trip in the drawing-room on the train: Mallory Thrale and his mother. He had gone in from his seat in the Pullman occasionally to sit with them.



"More or less," Wyatt admitted.

"In the dark?"

"It wouldn't work very well in daylight. With anti-aircraft and fighter planes on your neck."

"I see." She was quiet for a while, but he noticed that her eyes were taking in the surrounding country with a new interest. She said at last, in a low voice: "I know it isn't as certain as Colonel Ames said. Nobody could be that accurate. There might be wind, some small miscalculation. You might land anywhere. On this roof—beyond, down into the river gorge."

"It's possible, of course."



The body struck twice before it was lost at last in the weed-grown rocks.

"Maw got telling Miss Thrale about us boys and Paw and all. She tells her about the house the sheriff-people took for taxes. That's how come Miss Thrale come to do it—buy the house back for her! We even went to visit Bud's grave, and she didn't cry none.

She said a prayer for Bud and for me, and one for Miss Thrale."

Mallory Thrale turned to him now, and he saw that her eyes had softened and she said: "It made me happier than anything I've ever done. I only wish to God it had meant a real sacri-

fice. Or called for courage, or facing danger."

He didn't know what to say.

"Even if I could be the hero to him that you are. You know what he said to me? 'Maw's got what she wants. She's real happy now. What I want is to get in the suicide platoon—jump right next to the Major.'"

"You know how soldiers are," Steve Wyatt said awkwardly. "The groups are more or less alike, except that some of them land sooner."

"Did he ask you? I told him to."

He smiled then. "He asked, and received. He and Buddy used to jump together. Now he and I will. I've made him a runner."

Her eyes were bright. "Then *he's* happy?"

"It seems so."

He looked away from her then. Looked around the curiously tangled, anachronistic scene. He could imagine, from what he had seen of the movies, how such a place would have looked in the Gay Nineties—maybe some years later. There in front would be the broad sweep of green lawn. In the frayed, withered growths he could even now see iron deer, drunkenly leaning, and the tops of broken and toppled fountains. Faded flowers, the almost extinct descendants of what must once have been fancy stuff for this Texas wilderness.

HE smiled, thinking this. "You know," he said to Mallory Thrale. "I've never seen this place up close. Except from the air. Heard of it, of course. It's supposed to be haunted."

"Yes?" she said. "What else do they say about it?"

"It belonged in its heyday to an old rip named Sam Hewitt. I was afraid to come in here, at first. You know how it is in Texas—or maybe you don't; but it's a crime akin to murder to enter private property. Especially if you leave a gate open."

"But you did enter it," she said.

"Well, I noticed the gate open and no signs in evidence. And both of you here—"

It was rather lame, and he added: "Your father mentioned that he was hoping to get some more land to extend the reservation—so as to block off that county road over there." He pointed toward the fenced road that ran close to the river gorge. "That would give us right up to the Mexican line. Be safer when we used live ammunition out here. So I figured, no harm in taking a look. I've always wanted to. Nobody has lived here for years. Too fantastic for anyone except the old buccaneer that built it, I suppose. He called it his 'chateau'."

"Yes," she said, eying him. "That old buccaneer was my grandfather. That old rip."

"Are you serious?"

She nodded, gravely. "My mother's father. So I was curious to see it too."

"These Texas old-timers are still talking about him."

"Tell me what they say," she said, and she was smiling now.

He told her the story about the Chicago bar.

"I knew that one, from Mother. Father's never been so keen on the legends. Old Sam threatened to let daylight into him, I understand, when he was courting my mother. But she's told me many of them. Expurgated, of course."

She sat with her hands in her lap then, staring out into the sun. He felt contented sitting here alone beside her, on the time-wrecked terrace of old Sam Hewitt's Texas chateau. She told him some of her mother's stories about old Sam, and they laughed together. Almost like old friends, Steve thought, strangely happy.

"I wonder where Brenda is?" she said at last, glancing over her shoulder.

"Probably up in that tower; it should be quite a view from this hill."

"I hope she doesn't break her neck: it's on the Pisa order, you know."

WELL, she had mentioned Brenda, and it set a chain of thought going in him. It emboldened him to ask: "You've become quite chummy, haven't you?"

She met his look candidly. "We have, sort of. She likes to ride; we're the only two on the Post with horses. Thanks to you." She smiled.

"I'm glad I could be of use."

"Are you?" She was looking at him with questioning intentness.

"Of course."

"Then there's something else you can do for me—if you will."

"I'll be glad to—you know that."

"I don't know about this. I want to jump tonight. In Buddy Pitman's place."

"That's impossible."

"I've asked my father. And I explained why I wanted to do it. He's out of the Post. That leaves you in charge. You heard the mother that day in the chapel. My father hasn't a son; but he has a daughter. It would show those men how he felt, how I felt. And it's a simple act that couldn't interfere with or endanger others. I've watched and listened, and know how it's done."

"It wouldn't show them," he said. "They're all dressed alike. Their faces are blackened. And it will be in the night. They wouldn't know unless you talked about it later. Or were killed."

"But I'd know. And Billy Pitman would know. That poor woman would know. It might make a difference to her."

She was in deadly earnest, he realized; the look on her face like that of a child convinced of some incredible fantasy. He reached over and laid a hand on hers where it gripped the bench by her side. He smiled at her.

"Come now! You know the whole thing is ridiculous—that I couldn't even consider such a thing."

Her hand was away from his, and she was on her feet. He heard Brenda laugh back in the house, and then call to them as she and Ames came out into the sunlit, tangled garden.

"Thanks very much," Mallory said in a low, intense voice, "for considering me a child."

He got up, followed her as she turned away. "I only—" But she was walking swiftly toward the others, listening pleasantly as Brenda told about the view from the tower.

"Quite a sight," Ames agreed, walking over to Steve.

Brenda drew Mallory Thrale into the garden. She lowered her voice.

"Did you ask?"

Mallory nodded. The other woman eyed her shrewdly, then grinned. "You don't have to tell me. Well, don't take it so hard. It was a fool idea, anyway."

"That's the impression I was given."

There was a sharp, calculating gleam in Brenda Adamson's dark eyes.

"I've a better idea. You can see the world from that tower, and it's off the reservation. No official ukase could stop us from seeing the whole show from up there. I'm crazy to. Will you do it?"

Mallory Thrale watched her somberly, then nodded slowly.

Brenda's eyes gleamed again with quick satisfaction. "Can we use your car? As soon as your father leaves? We'll have to keep it quiet, or some spoil-sport's bound to say no."

"No doubt about that," Mallory said grimly, and she added thoughtfully: "It will be better than just being left back there like a couple of children. Here we'd be right in the midst of it. See more of the show than anyone in it."

"Good!" Brenda said. "It's a date."

"What's the big conference?" Ames called over to them.

They walked back to the terrace, and Brenda said gayly to Ames: "Didn't you say something about having to fly to San El today?"

"I did." He looked at his wrist. "And I've got to be on the wing."

Brenda smiled enchantingly. She had worked a swift spell on the air officer, Steve noticed. She said brightly: "Could you take a passenger?"

"You?" The Colonel's eyes quickened.

"Me. I want to get a coat and some things up there, now that the nights

are getting so beastly cold. I'll love you for life if you'll fly me up."

"In that case," the Colonel said with a grin, "it's a go. But we've got to step. I must be at Headquarters up there before noon."

Riding back to the Post in Mallory Thrale's car was a silent trip for Steve Wyatt. She had had to take him, as the plane had but two seats. Steve spoke only once or twice, but the replies did little to relieve the stiff atmosphere.

He said, after they had driven awhile: "Aside from the danger to you: Your father will be back today, you know, for the problem. I really wouldn't have the authority."

She didn't look at him when she said: "He mentioned your having to approve. He doesn't believe in interfering with subordinates. My impression was that it would have been all right with him if you'd okayed it."

She knew that was stretching things, and it gave her a malicious satisfaction to see the troubled look in his eyes. But there was a stubborn set to his chin too; and she realized that here at last was a man that she couldn't twist as she wished. In a way it was a relief, and she thought, as she stole another look at his tanned face:

"It would have been something. Going out of that plane beside him: floating down into a pit of blackness, knowing he was along. Landing, maybe, close by: sensing his concern for me; perhaps feeling his arm, hearing his low voice in the darkness as he came to see that I was unhurt."

HER heart stirred; she shook the thoughts away, angered at herself, and she said stiffly:

"Ames is quite a different sort, isn't he? Brenda just asked, and he said, 'Hop in!' It's hardly regulation, is it, to fly a civilian in an Army plane?"

"That's up to Ames," he said shortly.

"I suppose it would be the same answer if I asked to come out here to see the problem tonight?"

"It would, yes. Even if there was a safe place to 'see it,' as you say, which there isn't. This is to be a complete problem, all elements, and a real test of training. And live ammunition will be used."

"I see," she said slowly, and she caught another look at that hard face, and her heart seemed to pause in its beating. A good show, as they called it—fierce, swift action that killed men like Buddy Pitman—that would mark them as ready. Ready to leave at an instant's notice! All these gay, laughing, tanned young sons of Texas. Mere boys. Her father—and this rude, hard, unfeeling man by her side. She felt a tightness in her that was almost unbearable. Yes, even he. . . .

"If I could only go with them, share what comes to them!" The desperate sense of frustration in her almost brought the tears to her eyes. She pushed down hard on the accelerator, and the car drove forward hard and fast into the dust of the Texas road.

CHAPTER TEN

STEVE WYATT had a busy day after Mallory Thrale dropped him in the Post. He watched the chute-packing of the regiment, and later inspected every unit under arms. In mid-afternoon both regiments made a hard, fast march to previously designated camp sites in the hills. Steve's men reached camp just before dark. They took up a defensive position and ate emergency rations for supper. In a secluded arroyo where his C.P. had been established, Kirk appeared in a jeep. His eyes were eager.

"The General and his party are looking over your outpost, Steve, and talking to the men."

"I'd better—"

"No. He asked me to have you assemble your officers here. Two generals from Washington are with him. Better not tell you who, or you'll have buck fever. But they flew in from San Eliseo with him a couple of hours ago."

Steve grinned. "We'll do the best we can."

"I could see they were pleased at the way the men answered questions. Boy, they're on their toes, these kids! They realize it's the big night."

"How big, Kirk?"

"Plenty! Of course General Thrale knows what we can do. Naturally the others are a bit skeptical. It takes a long time to make paratroops from scratch. But these lads didn't start from scratch. Still, they'll have to be shown."

"They'll be shown."

Kirk nodded.

"I know it, Steve. They've read over the problem. They'll want to hear your orders."

Steve reached for his map. "Don't worry."

"I'm not. Only they just found out at San Eliseo that at last we have title to that border ranch. It gives us more room to move." He reached for the map, leveled it on the jeep seat. "See—the house, here, is suspected to be the Nazi C.P., and here—and here—anti-aircraft batteries have been spotted by the air corps. A pill-box here, another here by the fence corner. We crack down on them—and with live ammunition, it will be a real test, Steve."

The stirring climax of this remarkable novel will appear in our forthcoming December issue.

Fool's Paradise

From Australia comes to us this brief but vivid drama of the Pacific air war.

by WILLIAM LYNCH

IT was not yet dawn as Rusty's Beaufighter nosed up into the pack of cumulo-nimbus clouds that hung, ragged and black, against the sky. He reached for the heater and pulled thirty degrees more heat on to the carburetors before he settled back to take stock.

Twenty thousand feet below, the Coral Sea stretched out like a sheet of flat galvanized iron. Rusty knew, without looking close, that the Mitsubishi had crabbed his compass an hour—or was it a year?—ago, when those bombs had snaked down to a sleeping landing-field. Compasses, he reckoned, were like women; all right if you had confidence in them.

"I am at 20,000 feet," Rusty meditated, "and my compass is screwy on account of an explosion when the Beaufighter was grounded an hour ago. My wireless observer, Johnny Forshaw, is lying dead in the back seat, sprawled across the instrument panel of his radio, which is also spattered with Made in Japan. I think I know where the three Mitsubishis are going, for there is only one place they could put down. My remaining gas would just about fill a decent cigarette-lighter—but I can always tap the emergency supply."

Out of curiosity, he adjusted the earphones of his radio telephone.

"Six Beau four. Six Beau four," said the voice. "Come in. No point in going on. We've missed them. Return to base."

That would be Charley. Trust Mother to warn that the Beaufighters had all about exhausted their gas searching for three Mitsis that tantalizingly streaked in and out of the cumulo-nim, always just out of reach of the six Brownings that stared unseeingly from the edge of the wings.

"Six Beau four. Come in. You have already disobeyed orders in breaking formation. You are now instructed to come in."

(Like hell he would come in! What if he were carpeted before the A. O.? Even an Air Officer couldn't expect dead-reckoning from a crate that had no compass, a dead wireless observer, and doubtful radio transmitter, and to cap it all, a sky full of thick soup

that passed for cloud in this part of the world. Like hell he would go in, with Johnny sprawled at his back! Charley could talk until he was black in the face.)

Rusty noted that his ground speed was 280. There was no wind to talk about. He would make the valley in twenty minutes at this rate; and in the valley, if his guess were right, at a place where the hills rose sheer on either side, three Mitsubishis and two Zeros would be just putting down. How often, in an emergency, had he put down there himself, when he flew for Pacific Airways. Maybe Nip had known about it for a long time. There was no place, from Kavieng to Rennell, which apparently they didn't know all about.

"Six Beau four. We are going back. You are instructed to return. Look to your gas."

He looked to his gas. The needle fluttered between *Empty* and *Ten*, back and forth, as if it wasn't too sure of where it was going to stay. He took in as much more altitude as he could before the engine coughed; then he switched in to the emergency supply. He didn't want to come into the valley on a dead stick, because a crate with a dead motor is not much help when you are breezing down at a target that would first need to be located.

He eased the Beau's nose down, and came into a long glide. He consulted his notes, wind, temperature, drift, ground-speed; and he was perfectly satisfied with them all, excepting one thing—his direction.

"I am not certain where I am going," Rusty thought, "because that glimpse of the stars that I just got behind the veil of cumulo-nimbus drapery wasn't enough to make me happy. I can't find the Southern Cross at all. Maybe in these parts you don't see it this time of year. But I found the valley a dozen times before some clever bloke laid the specter of blind flying, and I'm willing to bet pounds to peanuts that I'm facing in the right direction. I am over the Coral Sea with a little gas and a lot of hope, and I am looking for a place where four or six Nips might doubtfully be playing hide and seek in the jungle. All

this time I could be easing down to hot coffee and a plate of eggs. Which proves I am unquestionably and completely balmy. I am elevenpence short of a bob, and when I get back, I will go to a psychologist and get myself eased back into the civil service.")

HE grimaced at the dawn. What he was about to do was better done in the half-light. But the dawn, undisturbed, threw myriads of tiny gray streaks slanting through the broken clouds cast into dull relief the brown ribbon of land that stretched northward on starboard. He held his course for a couple of minutes; then he made more altitude. At fifteen thousand feet he cut the motors, and came into a long glide.

Then he noticed the ship. She was short and high in the middle, and a long wisp of smoke twisted away behind her for a mile. He observed her features, a gun at each end, narrow and low in the bridge, a single funnel. Australian freighter! He waggled his wings in greeting.

It was nice, he thought, to have friends around here. Time he'd got through with Nip, gas would be down to the bottom-slops, and then it would be extremely nice to have somewhere to go for breakfast.

The Beaufighter, blackly silhouetted against the drab-gray clouds, eased down with a fierce, falsetto bleat of anger. Soon she crossed over the point where great seas lashed their own fury against the broken line of land, and soon left these behind to their own devastation.

Ahead of him lay the deep valley which he'd once known like his own backyard. Deep and rugged and heavily forested, it wound between the low hills like some monstrous legendary reptile, its head flat, like the head of a cobra. And it was at the head of the valley, upon the flat head of the cobra, that Rusty knew the Nips had hidden their emergency drome.

He sighted five all told, three large and two much smaller, all grounded. The two would be the Zero cover. When he got into direct line, he cut the motors in, and the Beau streaked down like a black thunderbolt, roaring defiance.

Rusty fingered the disk on the top of the control column, switched from *Safe to Fire*. He heard the slight hiss of compressed air as the Dunlop pneumatic control released the gun for action.

At four hundred yards he pressed hard on the button, and the concentrated fury of six Brownings and two cannon converged on the first Mitsubishi that filled his sights, as big as a battleship. He took another on the first dive, saw them take it and disintegrate. Then he roared up and

came round in a wide arc, took the third bomber in his stride. He noticed that one of the Zeros, too, was in flames. The other was coming at him through the trees.

He saw the silver of its wings glint menacingly in the light patches, as it crept up and behind him.

("He thinks I haven't spotted him. He thinks he got clean away before I banked to come in again. He is streaking away to the rear. Soon he will come down hell-for-leather, with everything he's got. But I've still got a little myself.")

He kept straight on ahead, feigning ignorance of what purred above his head. Then, innocently, seemingly without malice aforethought, he eased the Beau's nose round, and came down into the valley again. Cautiously he watched the Zero bank and turn.

("Nip wants to play. He has just spotted a brand new Beaufighter, and maybe he'd like to ground her without breaking her up too much. It would be something for Hirohito's mechanics, to have a Beau nestling prettily in a Tokyo backyard. Well, come out and play, Nip, because I'm sitting pretty in the fastest sea-level crate that ever burned the atmosphere. Furthermore, I've got this island valley tabulated to the *n*th degree. I was born and bred in these parts. Come on down and play!")

The Zero started to crowd him from above. Rusty flipped the stick forward, and then opened the throttle wide. The Beau gave a startled scream and streaked into the valley. The hills rose steeply on each side, dark-green masses of shadow that sped away behind like a swiftly-moving screen.

Then the Beau gave a roaring, asthmatic cough, and died. The needle was still flickering around *Empty*, shivering a little off toward *Ten*, but not much.

There was, he knew, only one way out of the valley, down to the beach—with a bit of luck.

At two hundred feet he barely skimmed the topmost of the trees that grew on the valley's bed. He set the propeller at full low pitch, and started to pump down his flaps. Ahead of him, the white ribbon of beach spread out invitingly. He let down the wheels.

("One, two, buckle my shoe. Valve down. Press the button. Mixture rich and heat off. That was a laugh! Got a wheel!")

The Beau pulled up quickly in the wet, firm sand. Rusty kicked the rudderbar over, bringing the tail-wheel round. Then he sprang out and lugged the Beau's nose round until she faced back into the valley. He clambered back into the cockpit, fingers hovering over the firing-button.

The Zero swooped out of the valley like a great silver bird. The valley mouth was narrow; and she filled his sights as flush as a baby's bonnet. She held there at two hundred yards; then she took everything of what the Beau let go at her. Eight streams of bullets converging on a space barely a yard in diameter was what Nip took before he discovered the error of his ways. Little pieces fluttered up like feathers, splashing into the sea, but most of her catapulted into the sand, and lay there half-buried.

Elated, Rusty began meddling with the radio transmitter. He tenderly moved Johnny's body from where it rested heavily on the instrument panels. The transmitter still worked, but with an undamaged Beaufighter lying snug in enemy territory, it would be bad business to break radio silence. They would probably tell him he was off frequency, if he tried.

He glanced out to sea, disturbed at the new hum that assaulted his ears. Then he saw them. Five in a straight line. The first four were Liberators, the fifth a Beaufighter.

("Good old Charley! Knew you'd start poking round sooner or later. Glad you came, Charley, because now I will have five confirmed, whereas previously I might have been a prime liar. Come in, Charley! The beach is nice and firm and the water looks good. Bring out the coffee and the sandwiches, and tell the Liberators to count properly when they get to the head of the valley.")

CHARLEY came in with the A. O. They taxied alongside: the first to speak was the A.O., after, he'd surveyed the wreck of the Zero.

"One confirmed kill and one confirmed fool," the A. O. said.

"Five, all told," Rusty corrected. "There are four babies at the head of the valley. Granted I'm a bloody fool, sir."

"You were ordered to come in," the A. O. persisted. "You will be either court-martialed or decorated," he grinned. "I'll take any odds on the latter. But why didn't you obey orders?"

Rusty counted on his fingers. "Johnny Forshaw. Screw compass. No sun. Transmitter and telephone damaged. Cumulo-nim all over the place. Besides, I used to work in this island."

"You could have used astro-navigation."

Rusty fidgeted. "You know damn well, sir, I was never any good at arithmetic."

The A. O. took his hand. "You've broken all the rules of the Air Force," he said. "But you did it so damned beautifully that— Holy smokes! Did you say *five*?"



FATHER COULD LICK HIS WEIGHT IN SONS—AND SOMETIMES HE HAD TO, FOR HE'D NAMED HIS SIX BOYS AFTER OTHER ARTISTS, AND THEY GREW UP ROUGH AND TOUGH TO LIVE DOWN THE HANDICAP.

by JOEL
REEVE

Mulraneys Are Lucky

FATHER had thundered: "The Mulraneys must always be right! Never must the name be compromised in any way!"

It was a slow week-end at the 89th Street house. Picasso was home, a newly made full Lieutenant in the Navy; but our other brothers, Matisse, El Greco, Gauguin and Cézanne, had been unable to obtain leave. My girl, Patsy Caspar, was there, and Mother was giving a little dinner in celebration.

Father of course is America's foremost artist. Mother is America's Most Beautiful Matron. My five brothers are the Fabulous Mulraneys of sports-page fame.

I am the runt of this crowd of characters, and Father was aiming his remarks at me

He said, "In the matter of Charles Outlander, you were oversharpe, Tommy. You now have 'Impression of Nude,' also 'Nude in Rickshaw.' You also have a cash bonus. You took advantage of Charles Elphinstone Outlander."

I explained patiently: "I swapped him 'Impression' for his 'Rickshaw,' which he bought from you at a big price. You gave an interview in which you pointed out that your impressionistic stage was slick and phony. You were apologizing like mad for the work of that period. Outlander made a crack about it, and I offered him 'Nude in Lovenest' for the 'Impression.' He took the deal seriously, and I sold 'Impression' to Manny for five thousand dollars. It's your best, and

you know it—of that period, which you should never have attempted. Then I bought back 'Lovenest' for four thousand dollars, as Outlander needed money, he said. What's wrong with that?"

Father said: "Horse-trading! The Mulraneys cannot indulge in such business. We are prominent people with an heritage of Americanism which we must uphold."

There was a lot more. Picasso tried to change the subject, as he is the kindest of the brothers. Picasso is also the eldest and has the thickest neck. All the Fabulous Brothers are champions of something or other; and with Picasso it was wrestling. That is how he got the neck. He was a very good wrestler, but he is shy with girls.



I saw the heavy-set man. It was then that I began to get nervous.

Mother and Father did not yet know about Karen Karel. Picasso had met her at the USO and was smitten on sight. He had been seeing her on the sly and was worried about her. Because of Father's one-hundred-percent Americanism, he was afraid to bring her home. Karen was a second-generation Czech. I knew all about it, because somehow my big brothers tell me things they would not dream of telling each other.

Mother said: "Haven't you children plans for this evening?" Mother is still as beautiful as when she posed for

all of Father's famed "Nudes" and as kind as angels. She wanted to get us out from under Father's peroration. Patsy, who is clever and perceptive and nearly as lovely as Mother, immediately got up, and we all moved from the table, into the living-room, where Father took his favorite chair.

He said severely: "I want you to think about that deal with Outlander, Tommy. Perhaps you should make restitution."

I said: "Outlander is a fool, and I won't give him a dime. And anyway, you swindled the world with those

impressionistic things—you admit it when they pin you down."

I escaped quickly, because Father is large and rough, and can whip his weight in sons, which is no mean feat. I could hear Mother laugh as we went down toward Fifth Avenue, and knew that it was all right. Father is a great guy; but living with him is to live on the pages of American journalism, mostly in headlines. He is explosive. He is a nice big extrovert.

Picasso said: "Karen asked me to bring you. There is a gent. He hangs around."

"A rival!" said Patsy. "A triangle, like the movies!"

"Aw," said Picasso, scowling. "A big guy! Name of Sherbrin. Makes parts for airplanes. Karen wants to go to work for him. Very patriotic."

"What does he want of me?" I demanded.

"Friend of his said you were smart," said Picasso. "You are smart, too. I dunno. I'm disgusted."

"Pick had a date, and now we're all in on it like a house-party," said Patsy with sympathy. She patted Picasso's arm, and he kissed her cheek absently. The Mulraney's are always kissing Patsy, especially Father. It is a great bore.

"Karen says she is only interested in his airplane parts," Picasso said doubtfully. "You look it over, Tommy. You tell me what you think."

WE went into the cocktail bar of the Etruria; they were waiting at a table. Karen was blonde and sweet and shapely, with long, curving eyelashes which she dipped at you and made you surrender on sight. Her friend, Harry Sherbrin, was the biggest man in the place, much taller and wider than Picasso. His nose was slightly flattened, but he was handsome in a curly-haired sort of way.

He said to me almost at once: "You're Thomas Hart Benton Mulraney—Charles Outlander says you are smart."

"He ought to know!" gurgled Patsy.

This Sherbrin was no procrastinator. He ignored Patsy and Picasso and went right after me. "I have a problem. It is a thing too small to bother the F.B.I. or the police. It's about my plant over in Jersey—"

I said: "Now wait—I am an Ensign in the Coast Guard, not a consulting detective!"

Sherbrin spread his hands. He had long, tapering fingers and well-kept nails. He picked up a paper match and began tearing it into strands with great meticulousness, although he seemed not to be aware he was doing so. He said intently: "Outlander thinks you have a sort of prescience of trouble. I have been missing things—dies, tools, what-not. My production

the past two weeks is off. This is war work, and he suggested that you look over the plant."

It was all too ridiculous. Charles Outlander was trying to get even with me, of course. Sherbrin had mentioned that a friend of his knew a Mulraney, and the rest was easy to figure. Outlander is one of those lean and hungry characters who never forgive. I watched Sherbrin's clever hands tear the match into ten separate strands, and listened to him. It is very difficult to make ten pieces of one paper match. Most people only do eight. Sherbrin picked up another match and tried again, and I guess he knew it was possible, sometimes, to do eleven strands.

He told us about his place: that it was small, that he only had fifty employees, all of whom he knew personally, and that he could suspect none. He had a foolproof burglar alarm, and an old watchman, also trustworthy. The plant was open twenty-four hours per day—yet things disappeared.

I said: "The F.B.I. would certainly take this over."

Sherbrin said earnestly: "It's a matter of personalities. They have their methods, and they would succeed. But it would take time. Outlander says you sometimes divine things on sight. Won't you come over tonight and take a look, anyway?"

I said: "No, I won't."

Karen gave me the eyelashes and said: "Please, Tommy!"

I said: "This is ridiculous. If you want a real tough guy to look the place over—there sits Pick. He's my big brother, and he knows everything. If he finds your thief, he will tie him into knots and toss him in the sewer. And now Patsy wants to see the picture at the Paramount, with Coswell's Thumping Sixteen themselves in person, and will you please excuse us for now."

Patsy again came along willingly. I managed to swipe one of the torn matches without anyone seeing me, and put it in my uniform pocket. Sherbrin frowned, but there was nothing they could do about it. Picasso looked bewildered, but sat tight.

We went through the lobby, and a man was standing at the cigar counter. He was a burly man with protruding ears. He wore a green suit, too heavy for the balmy weather we were having. We went past him and onto the street and walked over toward the Paramount, despairing of a taxi-ride, of course.

Patsy said: "Are you sure you are right, Tommy? Maybe Sherbrin is having trouble and you could help."

I said: "Did you like Sherbrin?"

"He's very handsome," she said, touching the ends of her long bob

and cocking her head to one side. "Such expressive hands on a big man."

I said: "But did you like him?"

She shrugged and did not answer; of course she did not know whether she liked him or not. Women are such predatory animals that they rely mostly upon sensory perception.

I STOPPED in a drugstore at Broadway and called the Etruria, paging Picasso. After a while I got him and said: "Go on over to Jersey and stooge around. That character is trying to steal your girl."

"You," said Picasso bitterly, "are not kidding."

"I think it's a gag," I said. "I think he and Outlander want to make us Mulraney look silly, poking around his old shop."

Picasso said: "What'll I do in Jersey?"

"Make love to Karen, you dummy," I retorted. "See you later."

I hung up and went out. Then I saw the heavy-set man in the green suit. He was pretending to look in a shop window, and I knew he could see our reflections. It was then that I began to get nervous.

I took Patsy into the Paramount. For a half-hour I twisted and turned. Then I said: "Baby, I've got to go. Will you stop at 89th Street after the show? I'll meet you there."

She said: "Where in the world are you going?"

"I want to see Willy," I said. "I just thought of something I forgot to tell him." Willy is Patsy's brother, and is in the Coast Guard in my command. It's the training division, commando tactics, like Dempsey. "Please, darling!"

She said: "Okay, Tommy. I'll see you later."

Patsy is wonderful. Nothing perturbs her. She is always understanding, always agreeable. I got up and went out of the theater and slipped into the Tubes and took a train for Jersey. I got off in Newark and looked in the directory.

I found SHERBRIN PRODUCTS, and it was on Pennington Street. By great good fortune I caught a crowded bus down Broad Street and was able to get off and walk. It was three blocks to the railroad embankment, then two more down dark Pennington Street through a neighborhood of small factories and vacant lots. Then I came to a sign with Sherbrin's name on it, and there were lights and noises in the low, two-storied building, and in front was an expensive car.

I crept close and looked into a window. The man with the green suit was sitting in a sort of anteroom, his hat in his hand. I caught sight of Picasso's uniform as he went through a door marked *Employees Only*.

What to do, now that I was here, was another thing. I walked around Sherbrin Products, looking. . . . There were some sheds for storage in the rear. The building ran through the block, a short one, and was about fifty feet wide. Machinery was clicking away, but not noisily, just with a vibrant hum. All seemed orderly and peaceful. Parts for U.S. airplanes were being turned out each hour in this place. The importance of these little factories all over America, producing hour by hour the weapons which went into the making of this war for which we had not asked, but which we were fighting on a dozen fronts, was suddenly a clear thing in my mind.

I thought of the man who had been convicted of deliberately manufacturing defective parts for the Government. I thought of Harry Sherbrin's insistence on getting me over here, his reluctance to take Picasso. I thought of Charles Outlander.

I was strictly puzzled. I walked back to the front of the building. I was just in time to see Charles Outlander descend from a taxi and enter the building. Charles was tall and thin and foppish in his attire, but tonight his face was eager and the hatchet features thrust forward like the prow of a destroyer as he entered Sherbrin's building.

I went close and watched. Outlander hesitated and then went in through the door lettered *Employees Only*. The man in the green suit still sat, as though awaiting an interview.

I went scouting around the building again. There was no sign of the watchman. I began to get a feeling that something was going to happen. It was not a pleasant feeling, and it seemed to me that the odds were that whatever transpired would do me no good.

I paused, looking up at the darkened windows of the second story of the plant. A small light glowed for a moment, then went out. A head came cautiously through one of the windows. A voice whispered: "*Pssst! Here!*"

Something described a parabola and dropped heavily to the ground. I took a chance and said huskily, "Okay!" The head was withdrawn hastily.

I leaped for the thing on the ground. It was wrapped in newspaper. It was quite heavy. I knew that it was certainly a tool or a die or something valuable, and that Sherbrin had at least been telling part of the truth.

I crouched, tearing the paper from my prize. I was so excited I never heard the two men approach. They hit me from each side, like two football tacklers pinching up on a ball-

carrier. One swung a club of some sort and hit me on the head.

I was not knocked completely out, but I was paralyzed. They picked me up and lugged me in a great hurry toward the back of the building. They kicked open the door of a shed and threw me inside. In a jiffy they had my wrists and ankles wired, and a filthy gag in my mouth.

I recognized the rough tweed of the green suit as the heavy man worked over me, grunting. The other man carried a flashlight and a blackjack, and it was he who had slugged me. He was, of course, the watchman. He was not trustworthy, after all. . . .

And here was I, Thomas Hart Benton Mulraney, the smart Mulraney, trussed up like a fowl for market, while a couple of saboteurs planned a get-away, having done heaven knows what damage to a plant which was producing for the war effort. It was not a pleasant half-hour I spent on the dirt floor of that deserted shed, with the blue of my uniform suffering as I twisted and turned in futility, trying to break my bonds and only succeeding in tearing the skin on my wrists and ankles. No greater humiliation ever came to me, even when I had striven to outdo my brothers at their favorite sports.

Then the door banged open and the two men came in again. The heavy-set one in the green suit said: "I don't like it."

The watchman had a whining voice. He was a lanky, ill-flavored man, and he carried the blackjack ready in his hand. "We gotta get him outa here. We can slug him and dump him somewhere. Then we scam."

"He's an officer," said the green suit. "It'll be tough. We oughta scrag him for good."

The watchman said: "Mebbe you're right. The boss aint takin' the chance we are. Mebbe we oughta finish him and sink him in the Passaic."

"We got another job, and if he turns us up, we'll hang," said green suit. "It's been easy so far."

"Yeah," said the watchman. "I guess I better tie another wire on him. Around his neck."

It was one of those things in which you don't believe. The horrible feeling that this was all a joke, contrived by Outlander, came over me. If green suit had waited and followed me over here, he could be the tip-off man, and Outlander could have his revenge by scaring me to death. I couldn't say anything, on account of the gag, but I would have given all my profit on the deal in Father's pictures to question these lunks who had me down and almost out, believe me.

They were standing over me, debating, when the cyclone hit. The

avalanche rolled right in through the bolted door. It was Picasso, my big brother. He came wide-eyed and fast, and the watchman went after him with the blackjack. He was a tough, quick character, that watchman. He hit out hard and shrewdly. Picasso threw up his forearm in a wrestling guard. The weapon did not get home. Picasso caught the watchman's wrist and put his arm in chancery.

THEN the green suit was hurtling forward, both big fists flying. The light from the factory windows came in the sagging, broken door, and I could see every move. It was, like a swift action picture, with Picasso seemingly slow and the other two knowing exactly how to tackle him.

But just then the watchman seemed to take wings. He kicked out with his feet like a mule as his body went up, and a scream of pain came from him, and his arm cracked. His shoes hit into the face of green suit and checked the rush. Then the watchman flew on out of the door, and Picasso was stalking the green suit. The man was

a bull; he just lowered his head and dived in, biting, scratching, kicking.

Picasso gave him a forearm nudge that sent his head back. Then a head hold descended upon green suit, and he was caught. I've seen the Strangler beg off of one of Picasso's headlocks, down in the gym, in an exhibition bout. He doubles up that big right arm of his, and muscles bulge in all directions. The green suit couldn't even holler, because Picasso had seen me on the ground and didn't care how much he hurt the guy. After a moment there was no more struggling. So Picasso tossed the green suit atop the moaning watchman, and jumped to get me loose.

I said: "Pah! That was an oily rag in that gag!"

Picasso said: "I figured it out—with my own head. The only way they could get things out of there was from the upstairs window. The watchman had to be wrong. His recommendations must be fakes. . . . Then I saw him and his pal come in here, so I quick sneaked out and followed. . . . How did you get here, Tommy?"



Here was I, trussed up like a fowl for market, while a couple of saboteurs planned a get-away.



*Illustrated by
John Fulton*

"I had a hunch," I said. "Let's go back to the others."

We went inside. Harry Sherbrin's eyes bugged out, and Karen said: "You're all dirty! Tommy, what happened?"

Charles Outlander said: "He's been rummaging again. He gets into everything. How are you, Tommy? How's 'Nude in Rickshaw?' I bought an interest in this place with your four thousand dollars and am getting rich enough to buy her back." He grinned at me, showing his buckteeth.

I said: "They've been throwing your tools out the upstairs window. Who is the man in the green suit?"

Sherbrin said: "Why, he's the detective we hired!"

"Fine!" I said. "You'd better send a couple of your men out and tie him

up. The watchman will be needing a doctor."

There was much confusion, and Karen beamed upon Picasso. I found the stairs and raced into the loft above. It was a supply-room for the plant, of course. I went over to the window and searched around for marks on the floor. It was easy to find which window the die had been thrown from. There was a cigarette on the floor. Whoever had sabotaged the plant must have had a wait while his confederate came around to pick up the loot.

I PICKED up a match, a paper match. It was frayed and separated into strands. I put it in my pocket and went downstairs. Harry Sherbrin had a big office, and the man in the green suit was leaning against the wall, still a bit dazed. Harry was saying: "You'd better tell how you did it."

The man didn't answer. Charles Outlander said: "The F.B.I. will make him talk."

The man said: "Like hell."

I listened to them question him. He was a clam, all right. The police did not come, which was strange, I thought. Picasso was frowning, looking from the detective to Sherbrin.

Finally Picasso burst forth: "Look here. You went up those stairs, Sherbrin. You left Karen and me in the shop for half an hour while you were up there."

SHERBRIN wheeled around. Quick anger was in his face. He said: "Don't you imply that I am sabotaging my own shop, Mulraney! I've got trouble enough without you."

"Every other one of your employees were in the plant," said Picasso stubbornly. "I could see the whole works. Karen and I were at the end of the room. No one left. Tommy says the thing was thrown from upstairs. You were there."

Charles Outlander said: "Now wait, Harry. Don't lose your temper. Let's think this over."

Sherbrin shouted: "There's nothing to think over. I had to lay out a whole week's work and decide what material to order for it. . . . Why am I bothering to explain? Mulraney, you are a fool!"

Karen cried: "Please! Harry! You know your temper!"

He had one, all right. He was getting up from his desk and glaring at Picasso. I reached into my pocket for the two matches, the one I had swiped in the Etruria and the one I had found upstairs. Then I hesitated. Karen was pleading with Sherbrin: "Harry! You'll hurt someone! Remember you are bigger than Pick!"

I leaned a shoulder against the wall and waited. There was something about this Sherbrin, his assured air, his arrogance, hardly concealed, his contempt for the Mulraney. And he was certainly trying to swipe Picasso's girl. I let them go.

Sherbrin was advancing, saying: "I'll thank you to get out of here, Mulraney. You and your smart brother. We can handle this without any further help from you."

"Ungrateful son, aint he?" I put in.

Picasso said coolly: "He's a big jerk."

Sherbrin shouted, "You can't call me names!" and jumped for Picasso. He was a boxer, I saw right away. He had the long left and the right cross. He was very quick, going after Picasso while everyone squealed and tried to get out of the way.

Everyone but green suit, who knew his opportunities when he saw them. He started for the door, lickety-split. That was another thing for which I had hoped.

I let him get almost past me, then tripped him. As he stumbled, I got him from behind in a little deal we had worked out over on Long Island, with Dempsey. I swung him and hit him and nailed him to the ground. Then I bounced one off his button that fixed him for a while. It repaid

me for the manhandling I had received earlier.

Sherbrin was dancing around, boxing with Picasso. But Pick just took it stolidly, on the forearms, on the top of his hard head. He bled a little from a cut, and I thought maybe I should stop it, but I knew Picasso wouldn't like that. He just waddled in like a middle-sized bear, his arms bowed like a wrestling champ, taking his lumps. Then Sherbrin threw a terrific right cross and Picasso took it on his chest.

But Pick also took the right arm. He clasped it in his hands, and the muscles showed right through his uniform. He used his leverage. Sherbrin began to spin. Pick moved in, hipped him and gave him the flying mare.

Sherbrin lit on his own desk, and an inkpot upset. Charles Outlander bellowed: "That's enough of that! This is disgraceful!" He started forward, but I pinned him to the wall. Karen crept behind me, but she never took her eyes from the action.

Sherbrin was coming back, a little slower now. Picasso went to him and put hands on him. He faked a body slam, checked and followed Sherbrin's sidestepping maneuver. He got close and slipped his two arms around Sherbrin's big body. Then Pick just squeezed while Sherbrin tried frantically to fight himself loose.

Sherbrin's face turned red, then white, then purple. He tried to speak and couldn't. Picasso was like a calm old grizzly, just squeezing, using those muscles he had trained so faithfully all of his life. Sherbrin stopped struggling. He sagged.

I said: "Put him down, Picasso. In a chair."

Sherbrin sat there, gasping for air. Picasso adjusted his uniform and said calmly: "Well, he was up there."

I took out the two matches and dropped them on the desk. I said: "I used to do this. It gets to be a nervous habit, tearing up matches."

Sherbrin shook his head and stared at me. I said: "The guy who tosses things out of windows upstairs does this little stunt."

Karen cried: "No! Not Harry! I don't believe it!"

I shook my head. "I don't believe it, either. He just isn't that sort." I waited a moment, and it was very quiet in Sherbrin's big office. The green suit stirred but did not get up. I guess I broke his jaw with that trick.

I said: "Where was Charles when Harry was upstairs and you and Karen waited, Pick?"

Picasso said: "Why, he hadn't come in. He didn't come in until just now, did he?"

I said: "Yeah, he did. I saw him come in right after you."



Charles Outlander bellowed:

Charles said: "You little—"

I guess he had a gun. But Picasso jammed him into a corner and held him with one hand. I said to Sherbrin: "Charles always plucked at matches. But you see, his fingers are not as clever as yours. Charles never did anything but try to swindle people in art deals. I guess Tojo or Adoll hired him to swindle America. . . . He only can do nine strands. You always slit the matches into ten, and I'll bet you can do eleven."

PICKING up the matches, I said: "This is yours, from the Etruria. Ten strips, see? Almost eleven, only it tore. And this is his—a weak nine. Really eight, because his fingernails are too blunt. He must have been

hiding up there all the time you were doing your figuring. I'll bet he hired your watchman—and also your detective."

Harry Sherbrin nodded dumbly; he certainly did not feel like talking. I said: "They were going to kill me. Outlander thought he would make stooges of us. He saw Pick in here and thought he would pull a steal under Pick's nose. He doesn't like the Mulraneys. He thinks Father isn't a very great artist. He got trimmed, thinking that way. He's not very smart."

Harry Sherbrin came to life. He said with dignity: "Thank you—both of you. And—Pick, I always thought a boxer could beat a wrestler. I was—er—heavyweight amateur champion



"That's enough of that! This is disgraceful!"

a few years back. I admit you can beat me."

Picasso, who is a very kindly fellow, extended his hand. He said: "You're all right, Harry. You must come over and have a drink with Father." That is the accolade. A Mulraney can do no more than ask a friend to meet Father. I guess Sherbrin vaguely knew it, because he lighted up and was happy again.

It seemed that Charles was supposed to have called the cops, but didn't, thinking he could get his green-suited friend loose in some manner. So Harry called them, and we finished the thing up and went back to New York. Karen came along.

Karen was all a-twitter, and all the way over, she kept telling Pick how

great he was, and how smart to find me in the shed and everything. And how wonderful, the way he handled Harry. I chuckled to myself. I said: "You'd better come and meet Father."

THEY were scared, but it was as good a time as any. We got to the 89th Street house, and they were all on the front stoop; and when they saw us, they all talked at once. Mattisse and El Greco and Gauguin and Cézanne had come in, and Patsy had looked up the Sherbrin plant and they were all coming over to see if I had really gone there. Patsy knew it wasn't Willy, because Willy wasn't even home that week-end, and she had held in as long as possible, but finally she had panicked.

It was a great thing. I introduced Karen to Father as "Miss Karel"—but made it sound like "Carroll." Pick blushed slightly, and Father grabbed Karen, looked at those marvelous eyelashes and began kissing her.

That is how my brother Picasso got his girl.

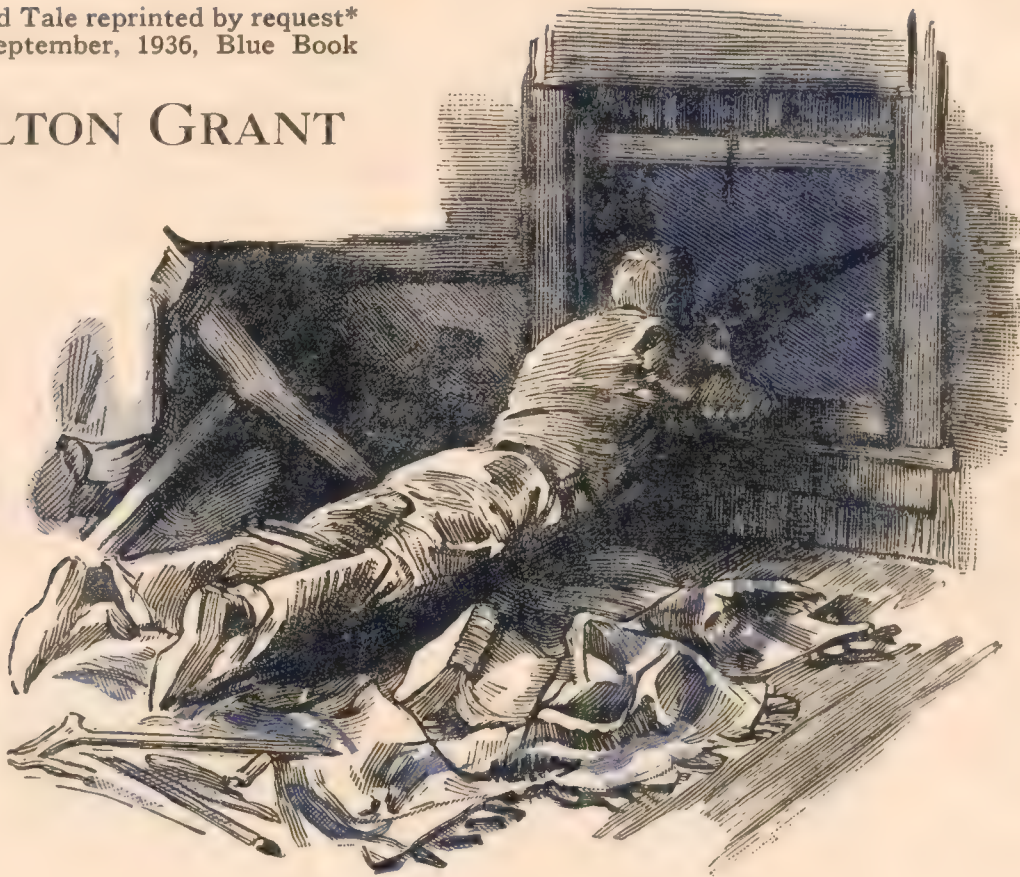
But it was an odd thing—after I put the second paper match in my pocket over in that dark storeroom, I had no more idea which was which than did Charles Outlander. I just knew Outlander's habits, and thought he was a crook, and it sort of had to be him who was playing tricks. But if he hadn't practically confessed, it would have been a hell of a thing, wouldn't it?

The Mulraney's are also lucky!

Springfield 00078596

A Twice-told Tale reprinted by request*
from the September, 1936, Blue Book

by FULTON GRANT



Wood engravings
by Louis F. Grant

THE old Greek poet Hesiod gives us the picture of the three Fate Sisters, weaving a tapestry out of human lives and winding the threads of mortal men around each other to form their fearful patterns. Sister Clotho spun; Sister Lachesis measured; and grim Sister Atropos cut those threads. Perhaps we moderns ought to dismiss any such unscientific business with a superior wave of the fingers and a flip of the wrist; but modern science has done very little to explain phenomena like the tangling of the threads of Dr. Samuel Brede and Christian Mowbray. "Friendship" we call it; but the touch of Fate in it transcended friendship; and then,

*We are glad to hear from readers who have in memory a specific story they would like to read again.

this business of the Springfield rifle and what came of it is a design so clear and defined that you can't explain it away by coincidence. It's a story.

The place was France, in 1918. The date was September 30. Those spinning sisters gathered in the olive-drab life-thread of Captain Samuel Brede, field surgeon attached to the 27th New York Division, A.E.F., and knotted it loosely around a bright little strand which had somehow got caught in Sister Atropos' shears and was almost severed.

That gallant New York division was hurled against Crown Prince Wilhelm's shock-troops, who had dug in and built tunnels and gun-nests along the Saint-Quentin Canal. Untrained, inexperienced, they preceded the Aussies, raced down the Canal banks like demons, swam or waded the Canal

and completed the rout of the Germans while the Australians mopped up. The slaughter was horrible. We need not go into that.

Captain Brede had charge of a makeshift field hospital in the cellar of a shell-shattered farmhouse near Bellingris. Outside was a dense fog, a dense hail of bullets, a dense spray of blood. You've read about that battle; maybe you were there. But inside that cellar, dying souls going up to heaven made a still denser vapor. Brede did his best, but it could not be much. They dragged them in—mere kids, who should still have been home in school. He doused them with iodine, gave them a case number, piled them on cots, and sent them inside to a hospital when the raid was over. Most of them died; he knew that they would. Brede was a method-

ical man, however; and he made a diary of his cases. He didn't stop to speculate what might become of them—those torn, gutted, maimed boys—if miraculously they should live. Men go mad from that kind of speculation. But he noted their tags and their numbers, made a brief record of their wounds, and shoved them through. . . . He never noticed the boy Christian Mowbray, or if he did, he forgot it. Those things are better to forget.

Brede left the army after the war—Dr. Samuel Brede now, and a clever practical surgeon. At heart, however, he was still a soldier, still filled with an unsatisfied need of motion. He built himself no lucrative practice. He cared nothing for the social manipulation that brings celebrity to some medical men. He cared only about two things—moving about the world, and making cures: that the two were incompatible he knew well, but he could do nothing about it.

IN the month of June, 1932, Dr. Samuel Brede, attached to the American Hospital in Neuilly, near Paris, came suddenly to the decision that he was fed up with Europe. He served notice on the hospital, insisted gently but firmly on going, when the Board urged him to remain, and bought a passage on the little French liner *Degrasse*, to sail on June twenty-fifth.

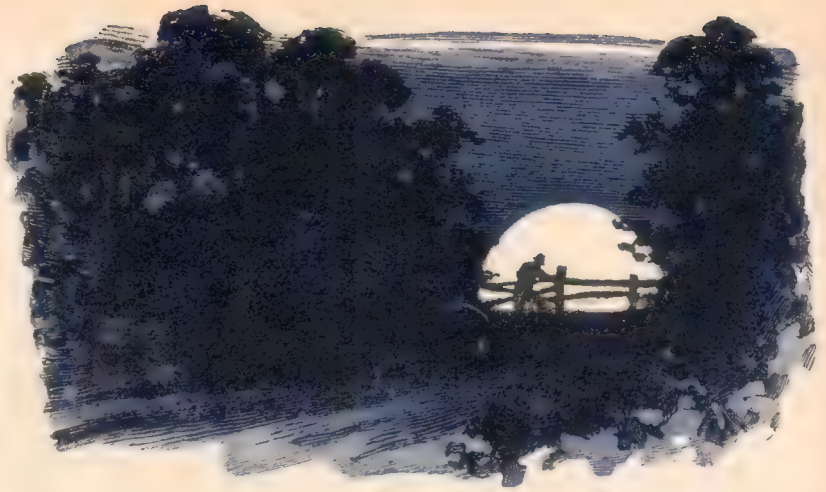
But on the eighteenth the Fate Sisters did their stuff again; this time the pattern they wove out of those two threads stayed put. Late in the afternoon of that day, a tall, fine-looking young man with powerful shoulders dragged himself into Dr. Brede's office at the hospital on crutches. It was apparent at first glance that he was paralyzed from the hips down.

"Dr. Brede?"

The ex-army surgeon nodded, and motioned him to a seat, but the man ignored the invitation. He stood there on his wooden props, his overdeveloped biceps bulging, a half-grin on his face, his blond hair dangling into his eyes, his clean, square features all lighted up with the flame of hope, yet lined with the grim crow's-feet of habitual pain.

"Listen, Doc," he said. "I'm only half a man—as you can see for yourself. I get around pretty well on these slats, but I want to dance. I want to play tennis and go fishing. I'm fed up with other people's sympathy, and I'm damned tired of their pity. I've been to all the specialists—Payo and Kreibnitz and Breightingham—all of 'em. They've cut me up into small uncomfortable pieces of meat and tied me together again; but none of them can make my spine and legs tick. Now, I hear you've cured some paralytic cases. That's why I'm here."

He paused. Brede waited.



"But listen, Doc. I want a yes-or-no answer. Can you, or can't you fix me up? Money's no object. I've got more than I'll ever need. But don't you kid me; because by God if you do, I'll come back here when I get out of bed, and I'll pull you to pieces with my own hands. I mean that—so talk straight."

He wasn't being tough. He was just a young man who had followed the will-o'-the-wisp of health over the world, from New York to Pasadena to Vienna to Paris. Dr. Brede guessed the story—knew the shame of it, and guessed it only too well. Surgeons with great names and greater bank-accounts had told this boy that they might be able to bring life back into those dead limbs of his, but they had lied. They had taken their fees, and they had failed him. Of course, they had failed. They had left him nothing at all but sage words and polysyllabic buncombe, learned evasions and doctrinal nothingness. And seeing this strong face before him, knowing the shocking story, Samuel Brede seethed with shame for the purse-snatchers of his highest of professions.

So he did talk straight. He asked three questions, and got three answers:

"Where'd you get it? The war?"

"Sure—the war. Some fun, hey?"

"What battle?"

"Oh, a mess along the Saint-Quentin Canal. I was in the 27th New York. It was the end of September, just before the Armistice. You look military; am I right?"

Brede didn't answer that directly; he said: "What's your name?"

"Christian Mowbray."

Then Dr. Brede dug into that little personal file of his—dusty, tattered in its broken pasteboard box—and pulled out a notebook with a stained, torn leather cover. He fumbled. He sat down. He spread the book before him, spotted a passage and read aloud:

"September 30: Tagged Mowbray, base of spine shattered; acromion and iliofemoral ligaments torn; basin and sacrum practically destroyed; to American base; No. 473."

The blond youth stood still. His face paled slightly.

"Mind if I sit down?" he said after a moment.

They looked at each other. Slowly Brede said:

"I'll give you an examination if you want, but I know right now I can't do anything. I'd give my right arm if I could, but I can't. Science hasn't progressed to the point where we can plug in electric wires where nerve-tissue used to be. I can't do a thing, and any other doctor who says he can help you is a liar and a crook. That may be rotten professional ethics, but it's the way I feel. I'm sorry to be so definite, but you asked for it."

The silence was heavy. It was as though some force were holding speech back. Mowbray's hands, gripping his withered thighs, were white at the knuckles. Suddenly he grinned oddly.

"Okay, Doc. I guess I can take up knitting now."

BREDE wanted to lay his hand on the man's shoulder and say some comforting thing. But he knew better. Instead, he stood up and said:

"I'm sorry as hell, Mowbray; but it's better to know the facts. The miracle is that you are here at all. I was in back of that drive, and it must have been I who passed you through. I made notes only of the worst cases. Damned queer, isn't it? There must be some kind of fate that sent you back to me again."

Mowbray said: "I want a drink. Let me drive you back to Paris and have one on me, Doc. Come along—don't be afraid. I can still drive."

And so they did.



"Eet ces the gun of one hero.
... John Smeeth, the mos'
famous of the soldats Ameri-
cains, yes!"

Perhaps it was no more than a natural thing that friendship should be born between those men. Perhaps the Sinister Sisters had no hand in that. Or possibly that too was a part of their life-pattern. Explain that as you will, it was at the Café de la Paix where Dr. Samuel Brede said:

"Mowbray, I'm sailing for home in a week. Taking the *Degrasse*. Why don't you come along back too? Maybe we can figure out something you can do. What d'ye say?"

And so that too was agreed; it was an excellent decision, which gave more beauty to the life-pattern. Friendship is a medicine to the soul.

It was only a matter of hours now. Christian Mowbray spent the entire afternoon of June 24 in shopping and in attending to those multiple details which crowd in before going anywhere from anywhere. It was toward five o'clock, when, tired and immeasurably worn from the effort of it, he directed his taxicab to a little *bistro* in the Rue Cadet where he had always particularly enjoyed sitting and watching the stream of people who pour down the Rue Lafayette as though the heart of the city were pumping them down a broad artery from the Opera into the capillaries of Montmartre.

He sat on the *terrasse* at a little rickety round-topped table, and he consumed four pernod, a secret libation to the historical ghosts who populate Paris for those who have eyes to see them.

Christian paid his bill, struggled up, and dragged himself across the street to the taxi-stand.

A policeman whose stately person stood at the intersection of streets to make gestures intended to govern traffic, triumphantly held up honking cars and trucks to let this smiling, sweating cripple pass over in safety. There was a taxi at the stand, and he dragged himself toward it, all unaware of the game which the Fate Sisters were playing. But it was a game, and the deft fingers of Sister Lachesis drew tightly on Christian Mowbray's thread and led her puppet along.

He had already signaled the cab: the driver had already opened the door. And then, suddenly, he saw the sign above the store window—and might have heard the distant chuckle of Lachesis.

The sign read: "*Curiosités.*" It was one of those queer, jumbled, dirty, but tremendously fascinating store windows. It was filled and cluttered with every kind of a weapon imaginable—rusty horse-pistols, rapiers, flintlocks captured from the Druses of Syria, hauberts of steel, two-handed swords purporting to be relics of the Crusades but doubtless manufactured in the Faubourg St. Antoine, coats of mail, poniards, stiletos, *matraques* for the local *apaches*, and even small Browning automatics to encourage everyday modern crime.

FASCINATED, Christian Mowbray could not resist a last look at the mute show of this window which was so symbolic of the Paris he was leaving, such a mixture of quaintness and counterfeit, of the sentimental and of absurdity, of bluff and beauty. He left the taxi-driver to growl, and dragged his feet behind his crutches to the little grille in front of the window, and peered in at the display.

Chuckle of Fate! It was hanging there from a rack, rusty and dusty, among the flintlocks and Mausers and daggers and the counterfeit curios—an American Springfield rifle. It stirred some consciousness within Christian Mowbray, and drew him closer. He came over and leaned on the grille and tried to read the die-print on the barrel where the serial number should have been. That was the action of a soldier. No one who had not cherished a Springfield, drilled with it, polished it, burnished it and loved it, would have thought to look for the number. But Christian Mowbray did that; and presently, because the light was poor, he shifted his weight on his crutches and dragged himself into the shop.

A musty little Frenchman pattered to greet him, smirking.

"Show me that." And Christian pointed to the Springfield.

"Ah, but Monsieur is American?" warbled the little *patron*, already

counting the extra francs he would wring from this cripple: Americans are easy prey. The rifle was all but worthless.

Mowbray took the rifle in his hand, and his hand trembled. He lifted the breech, fumbled with the lock, found and studied the serial number. And then the flood of emotion caught him up and tightened his throat, whirled him in a kaleidoscope of memories, staggered him and sent a fever through his blood.

"Springfield 00078596—three zeroes, seventy-eight, five, nine, six!"

CHRISTIAN MOWBRAY, a boy just turned nineteen, had engraved that number in his memory. That rifle was his Springfield. It had been a part of him, like his right hand; he had lived with it, drilled with it, slept with it, killed with it—all but died with it. It was with this Springfield in his hand that he had charged down the Canal bank, trailing his corporal, mad with fear and fury, insane with the insanity of war, flinging himself into the mud, into the green water of the Saint-Quentin, watching the gleam of his bayonet—and then plunging into a sudden darkness when something ripped across his spine. *Springfield 00078596!* You don't forget those numbers. Not if you've owned a Springfield in the war. It's a part of your anatomy—hand, foot, nose, thigh, rib, Springfield 00078596. It was curled into the fibers of him, the digits branded into the convulsions of his brain.

"*Combien?*" he demanded. "How much?"

"Ah, but monsieur do not understand what eet ees, thees gun. Eet ees the gun of one hero, of one American who have geeve hees life for la France. At the terrible Château-Thierry, yes.

Weeth thees gun he have keel one thousan' boches. Weeth thees gun he have take' ten thousan' preesonaire. The name of heem eet ees famous—John Smeech, the mos' famous of the *soldats Américains*, yes! So, monsieur, for only two hundred francs I weel sacrifice thees gun to you—"

Christian Mowbray leaned heavily on his crutches. His big hand reached out and gathered the lapels of the little proprietor in a firm grip.

"Listen, little man," he said, and his grin was hard. "Before I toss you through your window, listen to me: You get a hundred francs for this rifle, see? And that's too much. And you'll get me a clip of shells to go with it, see? *Cartouches*, savvy? And don't you ttry to cheat me, because I get mad quick, and I'd just as soon wrap this rifle around your neck as not. *Comprenez?* One hundred francs. Allez-oop! Scram!"

Indeed, all Americans are mad. And this one, with his crutches and his terrible fingers and his grin—he was, of all Americans, the most surely mad. He was *un fou furieux*. He was violent. But the *fusil*, it had cost nothing at all. Little Jacques, he had found it. . . . Where was it, now? *Ah, oui*. It was at the Canal where he made the fishing with a line. One hundred francs? No, it was not too bad. And shells—ah, yes, there were shells. There are always old cartridges to be found in France—English, German, American shells.

"Eet weel be the ruin of my business, monsieur, but for one such as you—for one hundred francs I sacrifice the gun."

Four dollars! The chuckle of Sister Lachesis. . . .

In the taxicab on the way to his hotel, Christian Mowbray caressed a piece of steel and wood, stamped "*Springfield 00078596*." Like the rubbing of Aladdin's lamp, his caressing conjured up a genie of the past. This genie was a young man, a mere boy, with a square jaw and the fine features of the man Mowbray—no cripple then, but able and eager, dressed in ill-fitting olive-drab, smarting happily with sunburn from the drill-field at Camp Perry, standing in a queue of men in front of the quartermaster's hut. A Q.M. sergeant was issuing the new rifles. The walnut of the stock was a new, rich brown. The barrel and the breech were packed in thick grease, and heavy green oil dripped from the elevating rear-sight. Christian, the boy-soldier, held out his hand to receive this, his first insignia of soldiery, his rifle.

"Learn that number, rookie. Got it? Three zeroes, seventy-eight, five nine six. . . . Take it away. Next!" It was the ancient Q.M. sergeant speaking. . . .

Back in his hotel room, Christian had a night's job before him. Packing was done. Baggage was already on the way; valises were labeled "*S.S. Degrasse*." But there was Springfield 00078596 to clean.

Laughter was fresh in his face as he handled that old iron. No mistake about the rifle. . . . there was the triangular tear on the stock's wooden sleeve where a grenade-fragment had struck. Vivid memory of that! His fingers had tingled for half the day. Might have taken his arm.

He tried to recite the names of the parts. How he had labored over them once: cocking-piece, firing-pin, safety lock, thumb-piece, safety-lock spindle, mainspring, firing-pin sleeve, follower-bolt, bolt-stop spring, striker, receiver—

Piece by piece he removed them. They were rusty and thick with dirt and corrosion. The hotel *garçon* had

found him some *petrol*, some machine oil, some vaseline. *Petrol* for the rear sight, caked almost solid. He scraped at it and worked it free. He remembered that sight. "*Zero*" was two and a half points off to the left. Cockeyed, of course; but if you knew it, you could figure your windage and drop 'em in with anybody.

He used to be a dude about that rifle. You had to be. They never let you forget it. From the time you get it, all packed with grease, you start working on it, cleaning it, polishing it, treating it like a live baby. They caught you up in inspection if you didn't.

Picture that first inspection: Bowen was the sergeant's name, a surly mutt too; he took that bunch of rookies out with their new pieces, lined them up, marched down between the ranks, snatched rifles out of their hands, one after the other, spun them like fly-wheels, threw back the bolts and looked down the barrels. He had snatched Christian's rifle—this same Springfield 00078596. Hard, solemn, sardonic, he had held the barrel against the light and looked through. Then he had run his little finger into the chamber and pulled it out again with a little film of black grease over it. His surly face sneered. He stepped over to the boy, and slowly, insultingly, wiped his finger across Christian's face while he stood there at attention.

"Ya dirty tramp, ya couldn't clean a spit-kit! What wuz ya on the outside, a coal-heaver?" Then he spat, and passed on down the line to the next trembling man.

PICTURE the rifle-range, just before they sailed for France. Green recruits, all of them, and only six days' rifle-practice before they went over to fight. How the devil did they expect them to fight? But they did fight, didn't they? "*Hold 'em and squeeze 'em*." They made a slogan out of that. They had it painted down at the butts. They had it framed in the barracks. They steeped it in your coffee, and they dunked it in your salmon and stewed prunes. You lived it and ate it and drank it and dreamed it. "*Hold 'em and squeeze 'em*."

Christian Mowbray had held 'em and squeezed 'em with this Springfield 00078596. And he loved it. You put your face along the stock with the cocking-piece practically on your cheek-bone. If you hold it tight on your shoulder, it won't hurt; but it will cut your face if you don't. You put your finger along the guard and stick it far under the trigger so that the muscle-pad of your first joint presses into the curve of it. Then you release the safety and get the point of your front sight square in the center of the bull's eye at the butts, and you

frame all that in the aperture of your rear sight. Then you check your elevation to range, and your windage. Generally they tell you about the windage. You don't have your sling too tight, because it will paralyze your arm. You let your breath out easy and you forget to be nervous. You just keep squeezing your right hand, slowly, slowly, slowly, and pretty soon the thing goes off in your ear. You aren't supposed to know just when it will fire. That's a trick you play on yourself. You have to catch yourself by surprise. If you don't, you'll flinch. But if you hold that sight on and squeeze that trigger slowly, you'll get a white marker down there at the butts to show you're in.

Now, that was real sport, that shooting range. There wasn't any more fun than that. Christian had planned to do a lot of shooting when he got back from the war. That was going to be *his* sport. What he wanted to do was to shoot over the thousand-yard range. That was *really* something. He had qualified as "expert" with a good score of two hundred eighty-three out of a possible three hundred, but he never had a chance to try that thousand-yard range. Well—that was out now. You can't shoot with no legs. That was out now, like tennis and dancing. But it was good to think about. Good to find this old rifle, *his* rifle. Good to clean it again. Good to make it bright, to love it, to cherish it, to polish it, to be a dude about it again. Maybe he didn't have any legs that would be good for anything, but he did have that other part of him—Springfield 00078596. . . .

Ten days of monotony, that trip back to America. It was good, though, to have Dr. Brede with him. It was good to talk and to listen to that keen, straight-talking man. Good to admire him. But young Mowbray's monotony was that of nothingness, of void. Looking for new legs, looking for a miracle doctor—that had been an end, a destination, a purpose. Now there was no purpose. He was going back. That was all, just going. He liked this blunt doctor who spared him the feeling of pity which other people patronized him. Now in ten days that would be over.

And then—just blank.

BUT the Fate Sisters changed all that. The pattern of those two threads, *Mowbray* and *Brede*, was too definite, too articulate, to let fall apart into such emptiness. Lounging in deck-chairs, talking war, talking politics, talking travel, talking life, just talking, the Sisters made Brede open up his shell of reserve to this young cripple whom he liked so well.

"It doesn't make any sense, Mowbray," he said. "No professional man

in his right mind would do anything but build himself a comfortable practice somewhere, or get himself attached to some hospital. But I just can't do it. I'm going to start out as soon as I get my bearings in America. And I'm going to hike across the whole United States. I've got ants in my feet. I've got to move. I want to see people—the *little* people, not bankers and brokers in cities. I want to see what they do. I want to see what medical help they get and what they need. . . . I wish to God I had some real plan, but I haven't. I just want to go. Maybe I'll find some place I never heard of, where I can cure people who really need it. Probably not. But I'm going to hike."

That was the way those Sisters worked it. They made Mowbray answer:

"Gosh, Doc, hiking is too slow. Now you let me drive you around in my car. I've got a trick extension gadget on the brake and clutch pedals so I can work them with my hands. Driving's the only fun I have. You let me drive you around and play chauffeur. I'll pay gas and all extra costs. I've got more money than I know what to do with. I haven't a damned thing to do that's worth anything. I'm bored stiff. I want to go places too. I'm fed up with this limping inactivity. In a car I'm a man, but on those props of mine I'm just another cripple."

"Listen, Doc, I mean it. Tell you what we'll do: We'll start off by spending a couple weeks up at my dad's old shooting-box in the Adirondacks. You want to see odd little people? Well, take a look at those hicks. They're grand. Say, this is a swell idea. It's just a little cabin on a lake, miles from anywhere. We'll do some fishing and loafing while we make all the plans for the big trip, and then we'll take my car and just go off. That's ten times better than going on foot, Doc. Don't refuse me, now. You'll be doing me a real favor. Please, Doc, what d'ye say?"

And so it was agreed.

They made their plans. They loaded Mowbray's big car with essentials. They burned the road, both of them hating cities, wanting an out. They followed a river and turned off into a back road leading east to a big mountain. Green, singing forests and rolling blankets of grass, the mountains. Brede called it a "man's country." And it was, too—wild, savage, almost primeval. Mowbray's cabin nestled in a cove of a tiny lake that sparkled in the sun and danced with leaping fish. Houses were few, widely scattered, hugging the soil with grim tenacity. Dried, sunbaked men and women struggled for life up there, fighting rocks, warring against an angry wilderness which snarled at intru-

sion. Grim people, too, the sons and daughters of flint-hard Puritans. For Dr. Samuel Brede, anthropology, like charity, begins at home.

They had been there for five days of clear freedom. Fished, they had, and planned. Mowbray could strap his legs to a thwart and row a boat. Samuel Brede could handle maps, draw itineraries, choose roads, plan detours. Five days they had had now, and tonight it was good to sit on the rustic porch and to watch the silver top of a full moon move slowly up over the little hill across the cove. It was good to sit there, sprawling lazily, hardly talking, filled with anticipation of their journey, listening to the moving silence of the twilight and the whispered singing of the water.

THE sound of a motorcar in that wilderness is not a usual thing. This one was coming slowly down a back road which leads over to a little town. The road makes a right angle with Mowbray's driveway, an even thousand yards across the arm of the lake. Twilight was thick, but there were no headlights visible, and that was an odd thing for such a twisting road. . . . They heard the car slow down and stop. The scrape of wood on iron came across the still water, and they knew some one had taken down one of the heavy timbers that formed a gate to the driveway.

Then there was another sound. It came faintly across the water, faintly and plaintively. It was the sound as of a child whimpering, a strangled sobbing.

"Now what the devil! Bet you've got a patient, Doc," Mowbray said; but speculation was shunted by a calling voice:

"Hello, the house there!"

It was Dr. Brede who called back, "Hello. Come on over," then added to Christian: "I'm afraid you're right. I'm getting comfortably lazy here, but somebody's bound to have a bad appendix. I suppose."

It was no appendix, however.

Footsteps materialized into a shadowy mass. From the mass stepped a man, and stood in the thin light of the kerosene lamp whose rays came through the open door to mingle with the early moonlight. He was rather small, lean, bare-headed. He had a peculiar, pattering, short-stepped gait. He was not lovely. His face was pointed, rodent-like. He came close to the porch and stood there below, peering up at them, his hands deep in the pockets of a double-breasted suit.

"Harya, folks," he said, and his hoarse voice was hardly more than a whisper. "I sees yer light, an' I wonders if yuh could maybe gimme a little water fer my bus. She's hot."

Dr. Brede stood up, stiff but gracious. "There's a lakful of water here," he said rather obviously, for he did not like this man. "You're welcome to it. Come in, and I'll get you a can."

"Oke," said the rat-faced man, and stepped up onto the porch. The stronger light showed that his head was bandaged, crudely, with a handkerchief. A dark stain was on it, wet and oozing. It was natural for the doctor to notice it and to say:

"My God, man, you're hurt! Let me see that. . . . I'm a doctor."

The man stopped short and peered at him sharply. He tried to smile, but only succeeded in lifting his pointed upper lip and baring two gold crowns.

"A doc, hey?" he said. "Well, maybe yuh better look at it. I hadda accident. I gotta piece o' glass in my pan." And then his pointed eyes caught sight of Christian's crutches, standing against the wall, and his limp legs making grotesque angles as they lay out from his body. "What's the matter with yer pal, Doc? Bust a leg?"

"Something like that," the doctor said. "Come inside to the light, where I can examine your head."

The man hesitated, then went in. He did not remove his hands from his jacket pockets. There was an odd expression of puzzlement on the face of Christian Mowbray as he pulled himself up painfully and slowly with his crutches, and dragged himself into the house. The rodent man watched him, and even his hard face showed surprise and something not unlike sympathy as he caught, for the first time, the full significance of those wooden props. He said, decently enough:

"Gee, that's tough, buddy."

Christian grinned. "You get used to it," he said.

There was a moment of silence as the man stood by the table watching the Doctor, who brought gauze and scissors from his satchel; and in that moment the wind blew a sound across the cove of the lake to them all, a faint, plaintive cry which might almost have been imagined. It was that same half-strangled sound of a child sobbing. At the cry, three pairs of eyes turned to each other. Christian, lowering himself into the soft lap of a cot, caught a sudden nervousness in the man's eyes.

"Let's get goin', Doc," he said. "My kid is back there in my car, waitin' fer me."

He removed his left hand from his pocket and leaned with it on the table while the physician snipped through the bandage on his head. There was blood. There was a long, ripping furrow, a tear that carved the man's head from the back and had torn through



"This is going to hurt—like hell," said Dr. Brede. "Let's see how yellow you are."

his right ear, taking part of it away. It was still bleeding. It was evidently a fresh wound. And its appearance had an immediate effect upon Dr. Brede. He stepped back from the man and scrutinized him, lowering his hands and letting the bandage dangle.

"What are you trying to do, kid me?" he demanded in an altered voice. "That's a bullet-wound. No glass ever did that."

The ratlike man's lip lifted crookedly. His gold tooth said:

"Yeah? So what, wise guy?"

There was no fear in Dr. Samuel Brede. He said sternly:

"So this: Medical men are required to report all gunshot wounds to the authorities. You know that. You'd better tell me who you are and how you got it, if you want help from me."

The man's smile was cruel. A rat could have smiled like that. And with the smile, his right hand came out of his pocket, bringing with it an automatic pistol which he pointed bluntly at Brede's chest. He said:

"That's what you think. Now listen here, Doc: I don't want no trouble. see? We're all goin' tuh be pals together, see? As long as yuh don't get smart, see? But you're goin' tuh put a rag on my head, an yuh aint goin' tuh ast no question, neither. Because I'm keepin' this gat handy, an' if yuh get funny, you're goin' tuh get into the papers, see? Both of youse, with a X-mark on yer pan. Get me? So make it snappy."

ABRUPTLY, a laugh came from a Christian Mowbray, sitting on the cot. It was irrepressible.

"Why, the man's a classic, Doc," he chuckled. "He must have been to the movies."

The rat-faced one did not turn his head. The side of his face said:

"Just keep that up, pal, and yuh won't need them crutches again. —Start workin', Doc. . . . I'm goin' places."

Samuel Brede was neither coward nor fool. He did go to work, si-

lently, efficiently; but there was the light of thought in his eyes. It was not easy to wash the wound with that steel barrel pressing into his stomach. It was easy to "feel" the aim of it as he walked to the sink for water and brought iodine from his kit. But when the wound lay open and clean and unclotted, and his swab saturated with brown iodine was in his hand, he said:

"This is going to hurt you—like hell. Maybe you haven't guts enough to take it. I don't know what kind of a crook you are, but no crook has much guts. Let's see how yellow you are."

"Yeah?" The man grinned savagely. "I guess I can take all you got, Doc. Go to it."

Raw iodine is bad; but when iodine is old and concentrated, it is like a flame of fire. Dr. Brede flooded his swab from the bottle he had carefully chosen, and thrust it deep into the open gash. The man's eyes dilated with the pain of it. His face twisted in the sharp agony of torture. He jerked back from the light, screaming hoarsely:

"You lousy—" The roar of his automatic crashed through the epithet. The Doctor stood staring an instant, then clutched his stomach, and slowly sank to the floor.

The silence of an instant that followed the gun's explosion was like a blanket of paralysis over the room. Then it was broken by a little sound from Christian Mowbray, a stifled little cry of helplessness. Then rage caught him up, and the power of his huge upper body surged in him. He hurled himself toward the gangster, forgetting his useless legs, and sprawled forward on the floor, his hands clutching and falling just short of the man's feet.

The light of pain and frenzy died quickly in the rat-man's eyes then. It was easy to avoid the futile hands of this cripple. It was easy to step away from him, to kick him on the shoulder and watch him sprawl. It was easy to reach for the crutches, which the youth had forgotten in his sudden anger, to break them across the heavy table and to toss the useless pieces through the doorway.

"All right, punk. Yuh can't do nothin' now. An' if yuh make one peep, I'll plug yuh like I did yer pal," the man snarled.

CHRISTIAN, lying there helpless, useless, frustrate, could only watch him.

He watched the man pry into drawers, then open the desk and peer in, watched him seize the little bunch of keys that lay there and examine them. He saw a sudden light come into the man's face as his fingers picked out a small flat key from the bunch. He

watched the man turn toward him, step nearer him; then heard him say:

"Yuh got a car, hey? Where d'yuh keep it?"

There was no use in denying the car. The man could find it. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered except his friend, lying there on the floor, dying—or dead.

"Out back," said Christian. "Take it and get to hell out of here. That's the key."

The man leered at him, pocketed the key, started to walk out the door, came back and lifted the shade from the kerosene lamp, which he immediately blew out. Christian saw his body silhouetted against the moon's glow in the doorway, heard him climb down off the porch, heard his feet crunching through the loose earth and gravel. . . . Then he heard the roar of his own car's motor.

It was the anguish, the frenzy of anguish and fear for his friend that was father of a new thought. It crept into his mind like the rays of the sun creeping into a dim forest. And lying there, a faint smile also crept over



"Doc, I want a yes-or-no answer: Can you, or can't you, fix me up?"

Christian's face. He rolled his body over, felt with his hands, gripped the table, gripped a chair, drew himself up to the support of his powerful arms, and dragged himself painfully and slowly across the room.

The motor sounded louder now. It was passing the door of the cabin. Seconds seemed years to him. His body seemed leaden. He dragged himself toward a corner just lighted by a film of moonlight. There his sensitive fingers felt the long cloth-wrapped object he knew was standing there. It seemed a full minute before he was able to pull the cloth from it. It may have been five seconds. It felt warm and full of life in his hands, but it was a thing of steel and wood.

Springfield 00078596!

THAT single clip of shells was wrapped in the end of the cloth. How old were they? Thirteen years, maybe fourteen. Maybe they wouldn't fire. Maybe there was some speck of rust left in the barrel he had labored so long to clean. Maybe it would explode, weakened by rust and age. But it was his one chance. Lock and breech were oiled and clean. The magazine spring was bright and movable from hours with emery cloth. And the single clip of shells slid in easily, clicked with a gentle snap.

He reached the window. It seemed like hours, that dragging. But he could hear the motor rounding the bend of the lake. A broad silver moon was full in the heavens, low in this early moment of its ascent. It was the great disk of a target.

Like dark threads against the moon, Christian could see the four wooden bars of the gate which separated his driveway from the road. One was down. The man had removed it to get through. He must take all four down to pass through with the car. His figure would be in clear silhouette against that moon.

Christian smiled.

He leaned out over the window-sill, savage joy in his heart. One thousand yards! Hold 'em and squeeze 'em! Queer trick of Fate, he thought. He had always wanted to fire on the thousand-yard range. Well, he had his chance. Just one chance, too. He had to put this one shot in. A man's body would be as big as the bull's-eye at that range—sharp against the moonlight.

Zero was off two and a half points. He remembered again. He checked that, put the gauge over, wet his fingers to feel the wind, but the wind had died.

His cheek was along the stock, touching the cocking-piece. His finger was tight in the trigger, wedged in, on the muscle. Hold 'em and squeeze 'em.

A faint groan came from the floor, just to his right.

"Take it easy, Doc," he said, half aloud. "I'll get him."

The purring of the motor had stopped. Two pencils of light were focused on the night-draped rhododendrons by the gate. And then, in that awful silence of suspense, a little cry floated over to him, blown across the lake—a child's cry.

The black head and shoulders of a body grew in that circle of the moon. The bead of his sight was on, framed in the rear aperture. Hold 'em and squeeze 'em! The pin was gigantic against that body. Gigantic and wavering. Must hold 'em. Must squeeze 'em.

"Hold 'em and squeeze 'em, feller. . . . Take your time. . . . Get yourself by surprise. . . . Squeeze slow—you don't know when it goes off." He could hear the sergeant's voice through the years.

Then it happened. The Springfield's crash reverberated across the lake. A bullet wailed, and the wail was echoed in the cry of a stricken human. The head and shoulders fell away from the bead of his sight, and there was nothing there now but the round bull's-eye of the moon, grinning a silvery grin. There was no marker lifted to spot that shot, but Christian Mowbray—*Private* Christian Mowbray again—knew that shot was "in."

"A five, by God!" he said with a grin. It was his first and last shot at the thousand.

There was another moan from the darkness of the floor.

"Doc! Doc, are you bad?"

There was only a faint groaning.

NEW strength came then to Christian Mowbray. It was not enough to have fired that shot. He knew that death hovered near his cabin. He knew that he had a life to save. He knew that he must have medical aid, that he could only get through the help of his car. He knew this and he acted.

Christian Mowbray will never remember those next minutes—fifteen minutes, half an hour, an hour. He was crawling on his hands, dragging his body, pulling himself through the room, out the door, over to the porch's edge, falling like a thing inert down over the porch to the ground, dragging his useless limbs through the grass, gripping the sod in frenzied fingers, tearing at it, tearing at stone and dirt and pebbles in the road, driving himself on.

Even his overdeveloped arms grew weak and frail in that terrible drive, that surge down his roadway. The flesh of his hands was torn and bleeding. His clothes were rent from the sharp stones. At moments he lay still,

face in the road, in the dust, an exhausted thing. Then with a sudden surge of will, he drove himself on, wriggling, clawing, hand after hand, his eyes fixed on that circle of moonlight, his back arching and relaxing, arching and giving again.

And then, almost as if it rose suddenly out of the night before him, was the car, the gate, the moon behind, still grinning silver. And there was a dark mass, a blotch, stretched out before the gate, a twisted blob of a thing that had a human likeness. There was no motion in it. Christian, crawling, and in the agony of exhaustion, cared nothing about that thing.

Then he heard it again—the sound of a moaning child. It was near him now. It was in the road, outside the gate.

Christian drove himself on, reached the gate, pulled himself to his flabby knees, wrenched every ounce of strength from his fibers to lean on those cross-timbers, tugged at them, felt them drop, one by one. One of them, falling, struck his leg. It was a dull blow, but he felt no pain in that numbed and useless leg.

Then he was through the fence, crawling again. A small roadster was parked at the roadside, half-hidden in the shrubbery. . . . Hand after hand, hand after hand. He reached it, pulled himself up, level with the running-board, pulled up to the door. Held himself there.

In the seat was a little bright patch, almost shapeless in the blue gloom of the moon. It was squirming. It was crying. Christian's last ounce of strength wrenched that door open. The little child's eyes were staring at him, staring into the moonlight. A white patch was across the child's mouth. His hands and feet were wrapped in white. And Christian, lifting that moaning little boy into his arms, cursed the fiend who had bound him with adhesive tape and ropes, cursed the man who lay behind him in the shadows, possibly dead, possibly dying. If there is a hell where men's souls burn and writhe in hot agony, then such a hell was for such a man.

By what superhuman effort he released that small child from the ropes, dragged him out, got him into his own car, Christian Mowbray never knew. The town was some five miles away, and there was a doctor there. He remembered nothing of the drive, nothing of the torture in his bleeding hands and torn body. He remembered nothing, but it must have happened.

IN the tiny square of the town common came: The continued noise of an auto horn brought men running from the little town's combina-

tion post-office-grocery-and-drugstore. In the car, stalled there, was a man, his head hanging, his arm resting on the button of his horn, blowing it madly. He was unconscious. And in the seat beside him was a little frightened and wailing boy, bound firmly with adhesive tape. They were able to rouse the driver, and from him they heard a queer tale, a strange story that would bear investigation.

The local constable, the local doctor and a few men drove that car back to the lake. At the gate by the road they found a battered roadster, scarred with bullets. Inside the gate they found a dying man, shot through the lungs, but partly conscious. His story, too, was strange and unbelievable. In the cabin, in a pool of blood on the floor, they found Dr. Brede, a hole torn through his body by a slug, unconscious, possibly dying. It was a great mystery to those men, but the mystery was cleared in the morning by telephone.

LATE in the morning, Christian Mowbray awoke in a white room, in a white bed, with a white-clad woman looking down at him. With her were dim figures of men, smiling at him, talking to him. They were saying something about heroism—his heroism. They were asking him questions. They were writing down the things he said. They were talking about some reward. It was all very confusing. It was all very tiring. Why didn't they leave him alone? And the worst of all was a haggard, drawn-looking man who kept shaking his hand and thanking him about something. About a child, was it? Oh, yes. He remembered, there was a little boy who was crying somewhere. Why didn't they leave him alone? And there was a man in uniform talking about somebody named Spinel—Bubo Spinel, whoever he was. Said Spinel was a gangster; said he was a kidnaper. Well, what of it?

Then Christian Mowbray with an effort brushed the confusion from his mind for a moment.

"What about—Dr. Brede?" he asked; and it was an effort to speak. "What—about—Dr. Brede? Is he all right?"

It was the nurse who said:

"He's doing nicely. He'll pull through. You can't hurt a soldier."

And as the voices began again, with their questions, with their eternal babble, with all this foolishness about heroes or something, Christian Mowbray smiled slowly, and went off to sleep. . . .

Far up in Olympus, the three Sisters peered at that pattern, smiled at each other, nodded. And Sister Atropos laid down her shears. That was a good pattern. They would keep that.

A Novel of Revolt in the Andes

SCOTS

The Story Thus Far:

DUNCAN TORMAID M'GREGOR, though scant in years and in physique, was great in courage and in valor. As a stripling, Duncan had fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden. Later, an exile in France, he had risen to command one of the King's regiments. Then he fell in love with the daughter of the Spanish ambassador. But she had been promised to Prince Bertrand de Cazenave-Cavalli, and this wily courtier so arranged matters as to have Duncan discredited; the young Scot was forced to flee from Europe, and landed eventually in Lima.

Here the fame of Duncan's sword-play soon won him a place in the *Compañeros del Virey*, the bodyguard of the Duke of Valdivia, Viceroy of Peru.

Then the King sent a personal aide to check up on the Viceroy, and that aide proved to be none other than Prince Cazenave; he was accompanied by his young wife Dolores and her old duenna, Doña Manuela Panfilo. Dolores' maid Juanita, however, told Duncan:

"I heard the Princess was promised to another, and was falsely told he had died; and so, not once since their marriage has the Prince been permitted to cross the threshold of his bride's apartment—not even on their wedding-day."

One evening soon after, as Duncan hesitated on the threshold of a church he had seen Dolores enter, he was set upon by Cazenave-Cavalli and a dozen hired bravos. But the *compañeros* rushed to the rescue of their young chief; the bravos were overpowered; and Duncan, putting Dolores in care of the Viceroy, departed with his men on an official mission—for the Duke was secretly attempting to foment a revolution intended to end oppression and slavery in Peru, and bring free citizenship to all alike. This was an ideal close to the Duke's heart, for—unknown to the Peruvian grandees—he was himself of ignoble birth. The revolutionary movement met with a strong response; an army of the Duke's adherents formed to march upon Lima.

Weeks later Dolores, in shelter at a convent on the outskirts of the city, heard sounds as of attack, and saw in the direction of the viceregal palace



a mass of smoky flame. (*The story continues in detail:*)

IN the course of the next few days, Dolores pieced together from several sources the full, tragic tale of what was happening in Lima.

For there was Mother Eusebia, the abbess of the Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, who one morning had gone to town to call at the Episcopal palace and discuss certain parochial matters with the Archbishop. There was Doña Manuela who (practical soul) remained long enough in the Prince's household to gather up her mistress' jewels. There was Juanita, who in spite of the cloistered solitude and silence imposed on her, succeeded in having frequent (nor spiritually edifying) conversations with a certain good-looking young mestizo gardener through the wrought-iron grille of her

cell. There was the frightened gossip of the children whom the nuns were teaching their A B C's. And finally, on the following evening, there was a rattling at the locked and barred outer gate and a weak voice begging asylum:

"Open up and let me in! Grant me refuge—in the name of the Blessed Immaculata!"

Simultaneously, from the distance, there came an ominous surge and rhythm of hastening feet, a clash of weapons, and other voices in a savage clamor:

"After him!"

"Don't let him escape!"

"Kill him!"

"Hurry before he can—"

Once more the hectic rattling, the fear-fraught, crescendo: "Let me in! Let me in!"—while Dolores' fingers worked feverishly.

HIDALGO

by Achmed Abdullah



She threw the gate wide. She saw a man, clinging to the jamb to keep from falling; she saw, running swiftly, coming ever nearer, a number of Spanish soldiers. Their voices rose:

"Catch him!"

"Don't let him escape!"

"Kill him!"

Ferocious gayety in the quivering, high-pitched sounds. For here was the sadistic thrill of the man-hunt.

A broad-bladed dagger was tossed and fell short of its target. A musket was leveled, fired: *Plop! Plop!* The bullets went wild.

HASTILY Dolores pulled the man across the threshold; she closed, locked, barred the door. Then she looked at him. He was Serafino, the Viceroy's confidential servant.

He was badly wounded. A sabre-cut had slashed his forehead. His shirt

was spotted with blood. His hands, as if trying to keep in his ebbing life, were tightly clasped over his breast.

He smiled tremulously at Dolores. "I kiss your feet, *Alteza!*" he gave courteous Spanish thanks.

He bowed, but found the effort too much for his waning strength; he shuddered, stumbled, fell into her quickly extended arms.

By this time, the pursuers had reached the garden wall. They clamored for the man's surrender, and their captain shouted:

"You're shielding a traitor, a rebel against His Most Catholic Majesty!"

Dolores did not reply. She felt she must drag Serafino to the convent where his injuries could be attended to. She raised him slightly, putting an arm about his shoulders, while musket-butts smashed against the gate until it began to creak protestingly.

A moment or two later, attracted by the commotion, Sister Bonaventure, a stout, elderly nun who had been working in the kitchen garden, approached on a ponderous, lumbering run.

"What is it?" she asked.

Then she saw the wounded man. She heard the captain's repeated, bellowing demand that he be surrendered, and gave stern answer:

"This, *señor*, is inviolable ground—God's holy ground, a refuge for all sinners. The King's writ does not hold here. Off with you!"

Doubtless, in the past, the soldiers had had experiences with the fearless, outspoken Sisters who, for years, had followed their charitable calling in the rough Lima slums. Grumbling a little—yet laughing a little—they went on their way, while other nuns came from the convent.

They carried Serafino inside. They had nursed many sick, many poor; so they did what they could, did it well, though knowing that it was useless. The man was dying. He knew it, too. He said, in a whisper, to Dolores:

"I crave a favor, *Alteza*: Let me be buried in the same grave with my half-brother, now dead in his palace."

Dolores drew in her breath.

"You mean—" she stammered.

"His Excellency the Viceroy. It is no longer a secret. All Lima knows it; and half Lima, because of it, is at the fighting."

Then he told her the rest:

It seemed that, ever since Dolores had sought shelter with the brown-robed, barefooted Carmelites, Prince Bertrand de Cazenave-Cavalli had been a victim to his brooding reflections, there being the hurt to what he imagined was his love for her, the graver hurt to what he reckoned was his honor, his self-esteem.

Like many another man with no right to any self-esteem whatever, he was quite certain that he was entitled to a great deal of it. Now, faced by the stark proof of how Dolores felt about him, and with, furthermore, his brain seared by the memory of the Viceroy's insulting words about her lover,—for, by the Trinity! the man was her lover, in thought if not in deed,—his pride lay stricken, and his whole

being clamored for revenge. Revenge on the Viceroy, on Dolores, on Duncan M'Gregor—but first on M'Gregor.

His bravos had failed once; they would not fail at their second attempt.

He gave an order—which could not be executed. For on the morning after their departure, he learned that Duncan and the *compañeros* had ridden out of town—to be gone, said the rumor of the streets, for quite a while; and he began to wonder.

He hated the Scot. Yet he was not sufficiently blinded by his hate to doubt the man's courage, to believe that he had left Lima on the heels of fear.

So, why had he gone? And where?

On viceregal affairs, it was reported. But precisely, what affairs? And why so suddenly, so urgently, in the middle of the night? He grew suspicious.

The Duke of Valdivia, he considered, knew that he had come to Peru on a diplomatic mission, or rather on a diplomatic intrigue, with the intention of ousting him from his high position. He knew, furthermore, the weapon which would be employed, unless he resigned voluntarily: the threat that the shameful secret of his birth would be made common knowledge.

This knowledge—and, by the same token, the infamous realization that for years they had paid court to an illegitimate half-breed—would incense the Viceroy's haughty Castilian grantees. Murderous rage would be in their hearts; they would wipe out the insult with blood.

Thus would it not have been more reasonable if the Duke had kept his *compañeros* at home, to rely on the protection of their swords? Still more reasonable, given his notorious methods, if he had arranged that the Prince should meet death before he could proclaim the disgraceful tidings of the other's origin?

No doubt of it.

Yet the *compañeros* had left town. No attempt had been made against the life of the King's emissary. So, since the Viceroy never did anything without reason, something was in the wind; and the Prince sent his spies and bravos to find out the answer.

FOR a week or two, the latter were most congenially occupied.

They filtered their shrewd, crooked way here and there throughout Lima, listening to the gossip of coffee-house and *bodega*, of marketplace and shop and *bordello*, of the very backyards and stables and kitchens of the viceregal residence. Wherever they went, they spent money like water. But except for some scandalous (and quite truthful) details about the private lives of Dirk van Buskirk and the seven rogues, they discovered little of

importance—until there was an incident—or call it an accident—which helped to solve the riddle.

It was, according to Duncan, the sort of accident, or at other times lack of accident, which has so often changed the course of history.

For—so he would demand in his argumentative Caledonian manner—suppose Julius Cæsar had drowned in crossing the Rubicon? Suppose Martin Luther, while nailing his ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg, had smashed his thumb with the hammer, contracted blood-poisoning and died? Suppose the Spanish Armada had not been dispersed by storms? Suppose King Robert de Bruce had not watched the spider weaving its web? Suppose (though Duncan did not like to admit it) Bonnie Prince Charlie had been less fond of the bottle?

And suppose that, in the turbulent annals of Peru, there had not been the Duke of Valdivia's pet bird. . . .

This bird, a gaudy and impudent parrot from the jungly "green hell" on the other side of the Andes, had the freedom of the Viceroy's apartment. It flew about as it listed, stole and carried off whatever attracted its wicked, beady eyes; and one afternoon, rummaging with beak and talons in the pigeonhole of a desk, it drew out a piece of paper and winged away with it.

A valet gave chase. He caught the parrot, rescued the paper, looked at it casually, then gave a start, whistled shrilly through his teeth and—clever, greedy scamp—instead of broadcasting its contents to his fellow-servants, made a most profitable deal with the Marquis Alfonso de Gonzalez, the Prince's chief lord-in-waiting.

The latter went immediately to his master.

"The riddle," he announced, "has been solved, Your Highness."

The other took the torn document and read it. It was a copy, in the Viceroy's handwriting, of a letter sent to various people in the Andes. The Prince turned pale. He was shocked to the core.

An armed uprising against His Most Catholic Majesty? Revolution? It was fantastic, incredible.

For whatever else the man was—poltroon or scoundrel or anything you prefer—he held, absolutely and unquestioningly, even fearlessly, in a way, to the principles of the ancient Spanish tradition. Not because of any personal profit in riches or in power, that he might derive from it, but because, deep in his shallow consciousness, was the conviction that this tradition, and its resultant system of government, was right and godly.

To him, the King of Spain was by God appointed and must be by man

obeyed. He was sole ruler over his subjects' bodies, as his heavenly master was over their souls. To rebel against his authority, for whatever cause, was a sin as black and mortal as a sin against the Holy Ghost. So, with utter, fanatical sincerity, Prince de Cazenave-Cavalli believed; and he proceeded to do his duty as he saw it.

A quick blow must be struck against the guiding spirit of the revolution, before the latter realized that his intrigues had been discovered. A meeting must be held, but not in the palace where the Prince lived and where gossip was rife. Instead, in answer to messages sent out within the hour and enjoining secrecy, the Viceroy's courtiers—officers as well as high civil and household officials—foregathered in the house of the Duke's *Adelantado*, the Marquis de la Fuente: here they were addressed by the Prince, who came with his own retainers.

BLUNTLY they were told the facts about the Viceroy's base origin and baser plot.

There was then, at first, silence—tense, tragic.

From beneath hooded eyelids, men exchanged glances. They, too, as the Prince had done, thought this thing fantastic, incredible.

The Viceroy a traitor? A rebel against His Most Catholic Majesty? Hand-in-glove with the Indians, the mestizos, *criollos* and the rest of the crude, colonial scum? And this same Viceroy an illegitimate half-breed to whom for years they—haughty grantees of Spain with no taint in their veins of Moorish or Jewish blood—had given fealty, thereby besmirching their honor and staining their aristocratic escutcheons? Why, it could not be! . . . But it was.

They kept on staring at each other. The silence continued. It was broken suddenly by a hysteria of rage, a frantic baying of sounds:

"To the palace!"

"Kill the traitor!"

"The foul half-breed!"

There was then a mad rush out of the house. Great Spanish *hidalgos*, forgetting their dignity, went racing like dogs through the streets of Lima, picking up, on the way, a platoon of soldiers; and the slums spewed forth men,—ruffians and knaves and jailbirds,—who saw the excitement and joined the throng. Somebody, it appeared, was going to have his throat cut! Who?

His Excellency the Viceroy?

But—why? It didn't matter! Plenty of loot in the palace, wasn't there? Plenty of wine! "Let's go, *hombres!*"

On to the palace, a milling, moiling mob, rolling through the grounds. The few loyal servants were soon overwhelmed. The soldiers and ruffians



Fearlessly he met death: "Long live the revolution, which will come after me—and conquer!"

invaded the kitchens, the cellars, the rooms on the ground floor—looting, drinking, getting drunk. And the courtiers and bravos, led by the Prince, hurtled up the stairs to the apartment of the Duke of Valdivia.

He stood on the threshold. Fearlessly he stood there, and he laughed—a sharp, brittle laugh. Yet his soul was curiously serene.

He knew that this was the end: to his life, though not to his high hopes. So—and it was either his father's Spanish blood in him or his mother's Indian blood—he met death with a boast:

"Long live the revolution, which will come after me—and conquer!"

A fist smashed into his face. Swords and daggers struck in a sickening rhythm. He was thrown to the ground and trampled. Once his head—his brave, bloody head—appeared, and his lips shaped defiant words:

"Long live the—"

A dragoon captain's heavy spurred boot stepped on the open mouth. Arms tugged, pulled, lifted; his body tossed from the balcony and crashed on the pavement below.

There, an hour or two later, Serafino found his dead half-brother. He dropped on his knees and crooned:

*Lord, have mercy on us.
Christ, have mercy on us.
Lord, have mercy on us*

And as an alterthought—or maybe with no conscious thought at all, but obeying a racial instinct—he chanted an Inca hymn to the ancient, vanished gods, the vanquished gods of Peru:

*To thee I turn for help, O Cuqui-
Illapa!
To thee, O Master of Lightning!
To thee, O Sun King of the Coya
Raymi!
To thee*

Then he wept, with queer, cracked, high-pitched sobs, as old men weep.

So it was that in the evening, while Dolores was in the convent chapel, praying for Duncan's return, she was startled by the shrill piercing yells and the clash of blades. She heard a

thunderous cannonade, as throughout town the Duke's adherents hurried to avenge their late leader and as Spanish batteries peppered them with round shot. She saw in the distance—for a drunken ruffian had been careless with fire—the viceregal residence blazing like a great torch.

The conflagration spread. So did the rioting; it lasted for days. No longer merely Spaniard against colonial, or royalist against rebel. But it seemed as if a crimson madness had descended on Lima, as neighbor talked to neighbor, as neighbor argued with neighbor, as, all at once, neighbor went for neighbor with whatever weapon happened to be handy; or as often as not no weapon at all, fighting it out, stark and grim, with clutched fingers at the throat or clenched fist between the eyes.

Ever more men—and some women too, joined to brawl and struggle and assault; strife was added to strife. The Prince's soldiers were trying to restore order. Firing-squads and gibbets were doing their work from morning to night. All over town, the flames of burning houses were lapping the sky with swirling, twisting ribbons of scarlet and orange; and ever the savage chorus of battle was growing and bloating, echoing from street to street; echoing, finally, beyond the city gates and out into the coastal plain, to blend there with another symphony of sounds that boomed out of the east: a crackle of swords, a creaking and rasping of saddle leather, a rumble of culverins, a faint thudding of drums—the army of liberation on the march.

DUNCAN rode in the van, by Dirk's side.

He scanned the red horizon; listened to the far, feral resonance.

He reined in his horse.

What could it be? Had the Viceroy struck without waiting for the rebel column?

Duncan doubted it. For there were in Lima few men on whom the Duke could depend; and the soldiers of the garrison were in the great majority not colonials, but men of Spanish birth, loyal to their King.

Then what could it be?

He turned to the Fleming with a question; and the latter said:

"I know the highways and byways in and out of town. I'll ride ahead and scout. Make camp here, little comrade, and wait until I get back."

He was off at a gallop; he returned, late that night, with a tale of disaster.

The Viceroy had been killed. There was turmoil, rioting, street-fighting. But it was weak, sporadic. In almost every quarter of Lima, the Prince's party was in control. He knew about the revolution, and was



"Come in!" she said. The Prince appeared.

massing troops for an immediate advance against the rebels. Other troops had been sent for, were on the march from neighboring provinces, from Ica and Ancash and Ayacucho and as far away as Arequipa; horse, foot and the guns; hardy veterans from many a bloody campaign.

"What is to do?" asked the priest.

"Attack!" replied the Scot. "What else?"

Basil Axiotes, the Greek mercenary, shook his head. He said that the element of surprise was gone, that Lima could not be taken—

"Even so," interrupted the Scot, "I will order the attack."

"And," asked the Greek, "who will obey you, except your *compañeros* and, perhaps, a handful of reckless fools?" He laughed. "Take a look and convince yourself!"

He pointed.

Already the tragic tale of what had occurred in Lima had gone round the camp.

Though there were indeed still a few brave men willing to put their fortunes and their faith in liberty on the sword's swing, with the major-



"I've come for you," he said. . . . "To take you with me. You're my wife."

ity it was different. Those who had come as bandits, to do a bit of looting, decided it would be less dangerous to do their looting elsewhere and at some other time. And those who were honest patriots were dejected, in bleak despair.

It was the Duke of Valdivia whose high hopes and ambition, through the many years, had been their own. He had been their heart, their soul, their brain, their nerve-center. He had been the great steel spring on which, half understanding, half dreaming, they had gone through the gestures

of a young nation in the making. He had been the powerful magnet that had jerked them into a semblance of unity.

At some future date this unity would become a fact. It would bring a free, independent Peru, another proud American republic.

But not today, nor for decades to come.

Today the magnet was splintered. The steel spring was broken. The heart, the soul, the brain, the nerve-center—the Viceroy—lay dead, and the Spaniards were triumphant.

So why attempt a hopeless thing that could end only in massacre?

Men gazed at each other, embarrassed. They did not voice the pale, frightened truth in their minds.

"There's a woman," whispered one, "waiting for me in Sapallanca—"

"My wife was in labor before I left Huanuco—I wonder if she bore me a little son—"

"My fields, these long weeks, have been fallow, and only my old father to till them—"

"I think I shall take my two feet away from here with me—"

"And I my horse—"

They were off then—men and women—warriors and camp-followers; by twos and threes, by dozens, by hundreds—back toward the sheltering fastnesses of the Andes before the Spaniards could overtake them.

Feet ran quickly; horses and mules were spurred, whipped into flight. It was almost panic. And an hour later only ten men—a Scot, a Fleming, seven rogues and a Dominican priest—were left.

They sat around a campfire, prey to their thoughts; and the Saxon remarked angrily:

"I was a fool not to have gone with the rest."

"So," agreed the Russian, "was I."

"And I," echoed the Moor.

"And we," growled one of the Norwegians, speaking for himself and his three brothers, "have *always* been fools—God's own cursed fools."

"God's own blessed fools," said the priest. "For I've a notion that many sins will be pardoned you—because of your splendid folly."

There was then among the men a stillness that swelled the noises round about them—the wailing wind, the distant beat and pulse of the surf, the roar of the flames sweeping the roofs of Lima—and suddenly Duncan rose, girt on his long French sword and mounted his horse.

"Where are you off to?" inquired Dirk.

"To Lima."

"To find, I suppose, a certain girl? Wait a little, comrade! The seven rogues and I are going your way."

"Thanks," he replied. "But this is a way I must travel by my lonely, a deed I must do without help."

"Except," said the Dominican, "it you'll forgive me for being so often and so annoyingly the theologian, the Lord's help."

"I hope," was Duncan's dour Scots rejoinder, "the Lord will have enough influence with the abbess so that she will not bar the convent door against me when I come looking for Dolores—she being another man's wife."

AND it was a few hours later that Mother Eusebia was indeed barring the door, the outer wall gate—but against the wife's husband, confronting the Prince on the threshold and telling him:

"You cannot enter, Your Highness."

The Prince was accompanied by some of his bravos.

"Your Reverence," he replied, "I am, until word comes from Madrid, Viceroy of Peru."

"What of it? The King's writ," announced the abbess, as Sister Bonaventure had done when she had faced the soldiers demanding Serafino's surrender, "does not hold here."

"But God's writ does."

"Eh?"

"I've come for my wife. She's bound to me in holy wedlock."

"There is certain wedlock," was the spirited reply, "which is not holy at all. I,"—for the abbess was a learned lady, well versed in the intricacies of canonical law,—"*can* quote to you a decision given by Pope Clement the Seventh—"

"Some other time I'll be greatly interested. Not just now. Kindly let me pass."

"I will not!"

"But—"

"No!"

"You oblige me to use force."

He spoke to his bravos; they advanced. And (though this is indignantly denied by church historians) it is a fact that before they pushed her aside, Mother Eusebia raised her heavy, brass-edged prayerbook and smote the Prince with it across the nose. But this did not stop him.

He crossed the garden and entered the convent, while the bravos remained outside, guarding the front gate. A frightened little novice told him where Dolores' room was, on the ground floor at the back of the building, with the window overlooking the kitchen garden, and beyond, a rather rickety fence separating it from a rough road that led northwest toward the coastal plain.

FOR long minutes, Dolores had been sitting at the window, staring out into the night, and thinking of Duncan and of herself. Thinking that Duncan would never come back to her now—how could he, with the Prince in control here in Lima?

Duncan, she told herself, was severed from her by life, not by death. . . . Better, she reflected, to be severed from the one you love by death than by life. Death, at least, was a fact. One could not deny this fact, could not argue with it, could not change it. It was less a heartache than the memory of a heartache.

But live things, live people, gave your heartache no rest. They kept on whirling through your brain. They kept on asking foolish, useless questions: "Why, O dear Lord God? *Why, why, why?*" They kept on shouting in your ear—shouting their desires, their tenderness, their despair.

Dead things brought an end, a full stop, a clean and chilly and wholesome hopelessness; they said: "It's all over—nothing else can happen." But live things—that you yearned for and were unable to reach and hold—brought a sense of spiritual deterioration—eating away your soul. . . .

She gave a start, turned, at a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she said.

The Prince appeared on the threshold. He bowed.

"I've come for you," he said.

"Come for me?"

"To take you with me. You're my wife."

Dolores did not speak. Only her frozen, choking sobs, her fists convulsively clenched, and her roving, despairing eyes, were telling poignantly of what was passing through her young heart.

Then suddenly her sobbing ceased. She unclenched her fists. She seemed calm and collected as she replied:

"You are stronger than I. I know too that being what you are, you are never without your bravos. I am alone; I have nobody. But if you force me to go with you, force me to be your wife, I shall kill myself. I swear it by the Trinity!"

Almost, at that moment—since he loved her in his own way—he felt sorry for her: sorry for her despair; sorry, even, for her blighting hate of him.

But the feeling passed swiftly. Cursing, he raised an arm to strike her. His hand, aimed at her face, came into contact with her shoulder, clutched it. Her robe slipped; there was a glimpse of soft white throat; and a flame of desire shot through him.

After all—she was his wife, wasn't she?

He took her in his arms; his mouth was hot on hers; his fingers sought, ripped, clawed. She cried for help; and he was amused.

"The nuns," he laughed, "are at the praying. Nobody can help you."

"No, nobody could help; nobody could hear!"

And then, a second later, he heard the door opening; he turned, saw a short man—shorter, but for his high, red heels—on the threshold. Desire collapsed and fear came; he started to run from the room; but he heard the man's voice:

"Defend yourself, coward! Draw steel!"

He did draw; he lunged. But the other's lunge was quicker. And that was the end—of ambition and desire and life—as far as the Prince was concerned.

LATER on, Duncan made grim fun of the scene.

He would comment that it had been quite incredibly garish. Like some of the melodramas he had seen in the Paris theaters: the heroine about to be ravished by the villain, and the hero arriving just in the nick of time.

Yes, yes, he would say, all very garish—all very fantastic and romantic. But that's how it happened.

And how had he got there?

Nothing romantic about that.

An hour earlier, he had ridden into Lima, had galloped through the streets—frightened, nervous, uneasy streets, full of scurrying Spanish patrols, with an occasional haphazard criss-cross of yellow spurts, as muskets were fired at looting rioting bands of ruffians.

Finally, by dodging in and out of side-alleys, he had reached the convent. He had trotted up to the front gate—and swiftly retreated, when he had seen several of the Prince's bravos lolling against the wall.

He had wondered how he could get past them; and then out of the dark, a voice had said softly:

"I knew you would come—and I've been waiting for you, Scots hidalgo!"

He had recognized the voice.

"Doña Manuela?"

"The same. Am I not always there when young fools need me?" she grumbled. "Quick," she went on, "the back way—over the fence there and through the kitchen garden! The second window, from the left, on the ground floor. The Prince, a novice told me a moment ago, is on his way to Dolores' room."

THE Prince, thought Duncan now, who lay there dead. Well, only life really mattered—and love.

"I love you," he said, and he kissed Dolores.

"And I love you."

"I love you more than you love me!"

"Oh, you're such a liar, Duncan!"

"Is that how you talk to your future husband?"

"Neither husband nor wife," Manuela, standing outside, cut in, "but the both of you stark and stiff in your coffins, unless you hurry away—come, come, come!—through the window."

"But," asked Dolores, "what about you?"

"You're mistaken if you think you can lose me. Pah, you two may be proud, astride the Scots hidalgo's horse! But I've found me a little brown burro that, if not proud, is as swift as any grand stallion."

They rode through the night. They rejoined the Fleming, the seven rogues and the priest. And it was by the Lord's will and pleasant grace, said the priest, that, ten days later, weary and saddle-sore, they came to the small seacoast town of Huaraz, many miles north of Lima, where as yet no rumor of revolution and strife had reached. It was by God's grace, too, that a ship was there, about to raise anchor.

Not a rakish brigantine, nor haughty argosy, nor full-sailed, handsome galleon, but a stout, square, workaday vessel that—carelessly and impudently, defying the decree that no foreign craft was permitted to trade in Spanish waters—announced,

white-painted on its side, that its name was the *Abigail Perkins* and that its home port was Kittery, in His Britannic Majesty's New England colonies.

Its master, Ezekiel Perkins, was in a black mood. It had been a tough trip round the Horn; it would be a tough return trip. The voyage had not been profitable. He was short-handed, having lost two of his crew by drowning and three by desertion; and his mother, the widow Abigail to whom the ship belonged, would have a few uncomplimentary things to say.

"Let go, Mister!" he shouted to his mate. "Let go fore and aft!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the other; then he interrupted himself: "Dugout coming from shore, sir. Man hailing us."

"If that's another Spanish don, demanding more bribes," growled the captain, "I'll tell him a couple of things."

A minute or two later, Duncan came aboard.

"Well," shouted the American, "what do you want?"

"Courtesy, first of all."

"Not a commercial commodity—at least not in my cargo. What else?"



"Passage for myself and my friends."

Perkins looked down into the dugout. He saw the priest, the two women. Then he saw Dirk van Buskirk and the seven rogues—big, sturdy, weatherbeaten men. He remembered that his crew was short-handed.

He turned to Duncan. "Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"Any place where I can find freedom. I've heard about the New England colonies—"

"Listen!" cut in Captain Perkins. "What have you to do with freedom? Why,"—here was his pet grievance—"the way we in the colonies are being taxed—and no proper parliamentary representation! What have you to do with freedom, you Englishman?"

DUNCAN drew himself up; he stared at the New Englander.

"My name," he announced stridently and aggressively, "is M'Gregor—Duncan Tormaid M'Gregor, Laird of Drimdorran, of Barisdale and of Loch-na-Staing."

Then the captain laughed.

"All right, Mac," he said, holding out a horny hand. "I calculate we can talk business."

THE END

Pilotin' Comes Natural

FOREWORD

THIS is the story of a boy who fell in love with the old style wooden steamboat which once populated the rivers of the west—prototype of the same twin-stacked paddle wheelboats which ran on the Mississippi in the days of Mark Twain. I knew the boy quite well and am convinced that he had an unusual succession of experiences: he dedicated his life to become a part of the colorful river activity, he worked on flat-bottomed packets and towboats until he achieved mastery of the profession. In the score of years while he was so engaged the "old time" steamboat disappeared into oblivion. Instead of growing up to fit into the picturesque river world he first saw, the youth matured to discover himself in a new era populated by strange craft of modern design. This metamorphosis came upon the scene with the quietness of a morning fog, so catlike, so stealthily, that many an American today is unaware of the fact that he cannot go to St. Louis and engage passage on a river boat to New Orleans; peculiarly enough, in point of statistics, the Mississippi and her tributaries are handling more freight tonnage today than in the "palmy days" when stately side-wheelers built the middle west.

The persons you will meet in these chapters were real persons; largely, the boats which are mentioned actually existed and did the things which are told of them; the scenes and situations are historically accurate in so far as the narrator can remember. I have been very candid in reporting the adventures of the youth described in these pages but I have no pangs of remorse nor do I have any scruples about so doing. Twenty years ago this boy was

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER ONE

I THINK perhaps the majestic size of the vessel did it; the *Queen City* seemed to fill up the Monongahela River with her great hull upon which was piled a succession of sweeping decks. That day in 1911 I could not comprehend how the crew of this big steamboat imagined they were going to turn the vessel around to commence the journey from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati which my mother, my brother and I were embarking upon. The enormous smokestacks were "broken back" on hinges in order that they would not get knocked off going under the low bridges in the harbor. Without a shade of doubt the packet was altogether too big; I had not imagined in the weeks of dreaming about this trip that we were to walk aboard such a monster; she eclipsed my wildest imaginings—I could not comprehend how I had missed seeing the *Queen City* sail past my home town at Sewickley, Pennsylvania, in times past, for she had been a regular feature in the business of transporting passengers and freight on the upper Ohio River since four years before I was born, since 1897.

When a ten-year-old youngster comes aboard a steamboat for the first time his normal impulse is to rush upward as high as he can go, and the two of us did just this. We craned our necks to observe the smokestacks when we arrived upon the roof and looked back toward the pilothouse; it was perched on top of still another

cabin which we had not scaled. We saw steps leading upward and, with a common impulse, started in a race toward them. We came to a sudden halt when we got to those steps for there was a painted sign there; it said: NO PASSENGERS ALLOWED IN THE PILOTHOUSE. At once my brother and I were on fire to ascend those heights.

My brother (who was a year my junior and somewhat reckless) placed one foot on the bottom step of these stairs which led to the forbidden altitude; he tested his weight upon the step and it sprang easily, being built of light wood. Involuntarily I warned him to keep away, hoping he would go on. He went up another step. Nobody arrived to "holler" at him. Observing that the situation was as safe as a kitten in my grandmother's lap, I said, "Get out of the way, I'm going up those steps."

Up we went, the two of us, young hearts pounding and hands holding the guard rail of fanciful netted wire set with occasional metal blossoms, all painted white. We arrived on the roof of the uppermost cabin and looked downward to the river which seemed a dizzy distance now. All around, to the sides, were great iron chains supported by square wooden posts, each topped with a giant wooden acorn with a shining gold-leaved berry and a bright red pod. We could almost look into the top section of the smokestacks out front as they were broken back toward us. Behind us two great pipes jutted from the roof below to heights above our position, and each of them was emitting disturbing noises and clouds of rolling white steam. To the extreme rear a jackstaff speared upward and an American flag fluttered idly in a lame breeze. This survey of our situation was wonderful to behold; also it was fatal; we lost the boldness of the original design to see the pilothouse. There were four more steps to climb in order to get into it. Furthermore, on the door which admitted to the pilothouse was a smaller sign which gave a final warning to trespassers: NOTICE—NO PASSENGERS BEYOND THIS POINT.

"Well," said my brother, "that settles our hash."

The pilothouse was a great affair, some sixteen feet square and perhaps twenty feet high, not counting the additional four or five feet of upright fancy trimming which adorned the top of it, a graceful geometric rise and fall of wooden lace and pinnacles. It was a glorified greenhouse, for there were great window sashes on all sides, save the front, made up of small panes—everything white as driven snow. I could see into the interior of the place and noticed a large pilotwheel and a coal stove and various shiny brass rings suspended from the ceiling by fancifully braided clothesline. More important, there was no sign of a human being in sight; I was careful to be sure of this observation. "I'm going in there—or die," I said. My brother sucked in his breath.

Up the final four steps we went. I grasped a white porcelain door knob and gave a gentle push. Nothing happened. "It's locked," whispered my brother. So near and yet so far away; we compromised and shoved our noses against the small panes and ogled inside: there was a radiance and splendor about the place which seemed related to the pulpit of a church or the inside private office of a bank president. Truly we were

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

By FREDERICK WAY, JR.

OHIO RIVER traffic has long been a problem of moving tonnage downstream. Since Pearl Harbor there has been an abrupt about-face and today the fresh-water sailors along the Ohio and the Mississippi, are struggling up against the current with enormous tonnages of crude oil, gasoline,

scrap iron, sulphur, coal, iron ore, billets, and other material of vital importance to the war effort. . . . Captain Way is contributing his part to this transportation effort. Within the past ten months his vessel has shoved 50,000,000 gallons of gasoline and oil eastward, where it is so vitally needed.

intruding on forbidden ground and this fact caused us to forget all else and drink in the details. Suddenly a hand grasped my left shoulder firmly and a gentle man's voice said, "Here, here, what's this?"

We turned to gaze upon the countenance of a slight-built man with a long white beard; the hand which lay upon my shoulder was clothed in a white glove. This man was wearing a black suit with swallow tails, he had on a white stiff shirt with a turnover collar and a derby hat. There was a hint of Santa Claus in the twinkle of his light blue eyes, and there seemed no harm in him, yet we were struck speechless because we could not be sure whether he was a preacher or not. It would not do to have a preacher catch us red-handed in the act of sinning, and trespassing and violating the written laws.

"We were just looking," I finally stammered.

"—Wanted to go in there, I suppose," said this man, drawing us out and never releasing his hold on my shoulder.

"The sign says we aren't allowed," said my brother with a brilliant stroke of genius.

The man considered a moment, relaxed his hold, and said in a studied drawl, "Go on in and look around for a moment. I can see you are little gentlemen not to have taken advantage of things. Open the door—go on in."

"—But the door's locked," I blurted.

"Oh, so ho! The door is locked, is it? How do you know the door is locked, my young friend? —You have tried it! Well, by Jupiter, I don't blame you much, but it isn't locked; it is just a steamboat door and sometimes they get stuck and you have to heave a little—try hard."

The door opened readily enough after some protest in its upper anatomy and with persistent urging. We went in and the bearded man took off his hat, hung it on a peg, and walked around as though he owned the place: for the first time it commenced to dawn upon my feeble brain that this man was the pilot: this was the man who was the brain of this huge steamboat; he guided it; he was the person who stepped up to that enormous pilot-wheel and took the superhuman responsibility of making decisions while this vast tonnage of decks, freight, passengers, machinery and all was at the mercy of the river's currents.

"Going to make a trip with us?" the man asked, as he settled back on a huge bench to the rear and spread open an evening newspaper.

"Yes, sir," I replied eagerly. "We are going clear to Cincinnati and back—a whole week on here."

"Well, well. Family with you?"

"Mother is taking us; she is downstairs unpacking."

"Does she know where you are?"

"Yes, sir—that is, not exactly. We told her we were going to explore around a little bit."

"Where's your home?"

"Sewickley—it's a little town down the river below here about twelve miles; did you ever land the *Queen City* there?"

"Oh, yes indeed—often. We will land there this evening to take on some race horses going to Louisville for the Kentucky Fair races. Do you know Captain Fred Dippold?"

Immediately we were on friendly ground, for we knew about Captain Dippold and his famous home along the river bank at the upper end of Sewickley, with the pilothouse of the old towboat *Dick Fulton* up in his front yard for a summer house. Thus encouraged we found voice to ask a hundred and one questions which were on our tongue-tips and learned that the long, slender cabin under this pilothouse was called the "texas" deck and the crew slept in there, and that only a few big boats had such decks, and towboats almost always never did have them. We learned the huge chains and braces along the sides were "hog chains" and held the boat together same as a truss holds up a bridge. We learned which treadle blew the whistle and were astonished to discover this whistle, composed of three "barrels" near as big as nail kegs, just outside the sash on the "star-board" side, which was the right-hand side looking forward toward the front of the boat.

The white-bearded pilot did not get along with his newspaper reading very well for the next fifteen minutes: two young boys duded out in blue serge suits (with belts) and knickerbocker pants, black cotton stockings and high-top laced shoes, and resplendent in Buster Brown starched collars with silk bow ties, and each with a smudge of grime printed on the end of his nose, did much talking and question asking. We wanted to know, for example, why the *Queen City* was in the Monongahela River pointed toward the east when she was soon expected to travel to Cincinnati which was on the Ohio River and to the southwest.

"All of the passenger boats come to this place to land," said our host. "The mouth of the Ohio River is below here about a half mile, where the Monongahela and the Allegheny join at the Point. Steamboats always tie up with their head-end pointed upstream because that method simplifies the problem of landing them in the river's current. When we leave here we will turn around; we will do that at every landing all the way to Cincinnati—turn around and land, then turn around and go on down; sometimes we do that as many as forty or fifty times en route." We did not argue this point, but it seemed a great waste of time and effort to us.

EVERYTHING went fine until a colored man wearing a battered uniform cap pushed the pilothouse door open and brought in a huge brass spittoon. Our dandified pilot friend took one glance at this intruder, folded his newspaper with a sudden motion, stepped down from the bench and said sharply: "Get out of here, you."

"'Is jest bringin' in this yere cuspadiah, boss," explained the darky man.

"You are smoking a cigar," announced the pilot, his eyes now blazing and his voice curt and loud.

"It aint lit, boss. Ah declare it aint lit." And the colored man placed the brass vessel on the floor and took his cigar from his mouth and held it toward the pilot for examination. This was the wrong thing to do: the pilot drew back as though he had unsuspectingly touched a rattlesnake. "Go!" he thundered. "Go instantly! Take that evil-smelling bunch of cabbage out of herel!" He reached for a poker and his face turned red with rage.

As the darky fled, the big bell on the roof tolled with solemn cadence. "You boys will have to skip out of

here, now," said the pilot. "—We are going to go." His voice still shook with emotion. We stammered some thank-yous and beat a retreat.

In the whole week of our journey down the Ohio River we did not again come into the pilothouse, nor did we have occasion to attempt to renew acquaintance with the pilot: we did not understand his sudden rage and were timid about being present at a repeat performance of it. Years later I learned that this fellow was one of the most gentlemanly and agreeable of pilots, that he lived a scrupulous Christian life and would not tolerate tobacco in the pilothouse while he was on watch, nor did he ever take a drink of anything stronger than tea, nor was he ever known to utter a profane word. I never saw him again after that trip on the *Queen City* in 1911; shortly afterwards he lost his reason and was kept at his home and nursed by a loving and gracious wife: frequently he went into fits of temper in those latter sad days and swore bloody murder and called his dear ones all the names in the catalogue. Three or four of the prominent Pittsburgh-Cincinnati pilots came to this horrible end while I was growing up, every one of them had been brilliant and capable to an extent far above the general average.

My brother and I went down on the main deck and watched the endless procession of tattered roustabouts carrying boxes and packages into the storage spaces of the packet. We watched sweating Negro firemen prod long iron pokers into the gleaming furnace doors while steam sizzled in the boilers and the air was charged with a mixture of strange perfume which was made up of wet steam, coal smoke, tarred rope and pine. A short, stout man with a look of authority came by, presently, and we saw the name "Captain" on his uniform cap, done in gold lettering. He wore a serge coat with brass buttons and each button had a pilotwheel on it. He walked out to the head of the boat where the main stairway led up to the cabin and took a braided rope in his hands and pulled downward. Again the roof bell tolled and echoed on the tall buildings along the waterfront: it sounded twice as pretty and mellow as the one on our Presbyterian church at home, and I was astonished, for our home town Presbyterian church was reputed to have the best of everything. Afterwards I learned the weight of the bell on the *Queen City* was in the neighborhood of twelve hundred pounds. "Break up!" commanded the captain, and a surly looking individual who had "Mate" on his cap started yelling orders to the Negro roustabouts and they jumped toward the planks which formed the walkways to the big wooden storagehouse to which the vessel was moored and commenced dragging these planks aboard the boat, letting them drop in piles with a tremendous clatter. The captain started up the main stairs and we followed him onto the roof.

Lines were cast off presently and the captain seemed full of authority until he finally turned toward the pilothouse and said "All ready, sir!" in sort of a humble voice and then our derby-hatted pilot, looking very solemn and grave, pulled one of the bell cords up there and never again looked toward the captain or gave him another thought—nor did he ever answer him or give any hint that he had heard or understood the order.

The great whistle let go a defiant blast and the boat slipped away from the shore: the immensity of the decks caused an optical illusion which made me think for a fleeting moment that the shore had commenced to recede from the steamboat. We seemed planted on a continent of our own and all else was in slow, orderly motion. A wealth of coal smoke tumbled and rolled from the smokestacks. The two pipes toward the stern commenced to roar as steam billowed from them in intermittent successions of volcanic majesty. Around we whirled, gracefully, easily! The *Queen City* was headed for Cincinnati.

Mother came along then and said it was supper time and remarked that we should wash our faces. I told her I was not interested in eating. Yes, it must have been the vastness of the boat—I don't know what else could have done the job: my mind was made up there and then to become some small part of the river.

I was ten years old in 1911 when we took this *Queen City* trip and was nearly dead from loss of sleep when we returned home: nighttime on the river enhanced the wonder and glory of the show and I could not afford to spare enough time to rest; every time the whistle blew I would slip out the outside stateroom door onto the guard and peer ahead to see whether we were about to meet a boat, or make a landing. Two years later the river's urge was still so strong upon me that an uncle of mine ordered a year's subscription to the weekly river magazine, *The Waterways Journal*, for my Christmas present. My mother watched this hobby develop and became vaguely alarmed. She had been reared in an Ohio River town and had a firsthand knowledge of the character of rivermen as a group. She knew three daughters of a prominent river captain who were about her own age: these daughters could swear a hole through a brick fence and the young ladies from respectable families in town were not allowed to play with them. Rivermen, by and large, had a reputation for coarse living. My mother did not care to see her son fall into this pithole of iniquity.

CHAPTER TWO

MIRACLES still happen, even at this late date, for I stayed in school and didn't go off on the river. Eight years after the *Queen City* trip I entered the Carnegie Institute of Technology with some vague notions about becoming a civil engineer. During those eight years I had absorbed all available river lore with the facility of a dry sponge and had never deviated in my steamboat interest and enthusiasm for a moment. During summer vacations I had sailed on a dozen packets to a dozen different destinations, and back again. I had commenced writing small contributions to *The Waterways Journal*, telling them such news as I managed to pick up and felt might be of interest (and get my name in print) and, for a youngster of eighteen, I was surprisingly well known inasmuch as everyone on the western streams devoured the contents of this magazine weekly. The idea of becoming a civil engineer was my mother's doing mostly—she was firm in her opinion that I would do myself grave injustice by going off on a steamboat to "learn the river" without having sufficient college training to hurdle all fences and become a man of authority.

Actually, at the bottom of my heart, I cared less for civil engineering than I do now for boiled cauliflower. But I had learned to eat boiled cauliflower without making a wry face and supposed a college education could be assimilated whole, if a fellow would hold his breath long enough, and pry open his mind sufficiently wide. This was a fatal mistake, of course, and within a month I was strangling, gagged, and deathly sick of the whole business.

Mother was a bubbling fountain of enthusiasm over the college project and reveled in the delicious thought of the day when I would don a cap and gown and be rewarded with a diploma. When I skinned through the first month's examinations with fair results, she said: "My son, I am proud of you; doubly proud, for you have given up that senseless notion of going out on that muddy old Ohio River. You are building a solid foundation for your future: you are destined for success and happiness. I have prayed for you and my heart is happy."

Even then the cock had crowed thrice. Just two hours before I had dumped my text books over Panther Hollow Bridge out in Schenley Park in Pittsburgh because I knew I would not need them any more: I had just received a letter from the manager of a river coal company asking me to come and work for him at once.

I showed my mother this letter (it was special delivery) and her heart sank, and we both sank, and wept. It was a heart-rending scene: two persons who loved one another, both holding honest convictions directly opposed, deadlocked. I could not know the depths of her anguish then . . . her eldest son packing his clothes to leave the home he was raised in . . . stepping out in the world alone and unprotected. My head was too full of river water.

The man who had sent this special delivery letter was Captain E. A. Burnside, river boss for the Campbell's Creek Coal Company, and known familiarly along the streams as "E. A." He was Manager of Transportation for this million dollar coal corporation which owned three steamboats, a fleet of wooden barges, a marine ways, and several landing fleets; he was a captain and a pilot in his own right, too. I judged I could learn something amid such surroundings and lost no time getting down to the Kanawha River town where he made his headquarters, Point Pleasant, West Virginia.

This venture was made with no knowledge of what I was expected to do, not an inkling of the rate of pay, and into the hands of a man I had never seen. I must leave home and live about two hundred miles away where the Great Kanawha joins the Ohio after its journey down through West Virginia from the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains.

That I was fresh and raw goes without saying, but my soul was overflowing at having escaped college, and work of any description on the river was chocolate cake with fudge icing.

My mother was a sensible soul when confronted with facts; she said simply: "This is your own choice; I am wishing you luck but I'll wager you will be home within three weeks." My dad had never been to college and was a great hand at believing in the school of hard experience, so he patted me on the back and admonished me to keep up my spirits and stick with the job no matter what happened.

I listened to this wisdom disinterestedly while my young imagination ran amuck and built a dream picture of what my first visit back home actually would be like. I would come in some day several years hence with the slouching gait of a real riverman, my vocabulary bristling with technical steamboat terms which I would drop unconsciously to the amazement of my family and friends, and my pockets would be full of money. I would buy my mother a fur coat on any old day of the week without waiting for her birthday or Christmas and would refer to the "starboard" side of my new automobile just as though I knew no other name for it. Perhaps the telephone would ring; I would be wanted by long distance. Captain Burnside would be calling to know whether the rudders on the new towboat they were building (purely mythical) should be canted to ninety degrees with the stern rake or set bolt upright: I would hold a long and serious conversation with him (while the family, spell-bound, would listen) and point out to him the various merits and demerits of the several schemes for correctly diagnosing the proposition and then would promise to hurry back so that the work might be done under my supervision. What could my mother do under such circumstances? —There was only one answer to it: she would place her hands in mine, tears would come to her eyes, and she would say, "Son, I must admit that you have brought me great joy and I was entirely mistaken about the necessity of going to college: can you—can you, in your heart—find it possible to forgive me?"

Perhaps you wonder why E. A. or anybody else would bother sending a special delivery letter to such a young nincompoop as this. He was taking a chance, of course; a bigger chance than he realized. E. A. had a notion he wanted to train some youngster to fill his shoes at some future time: wanted to leave the employ of the company with a capable man of his own selection and rearing behind him. A worthy motive to be sure. He decided upon me simply because he had heard of me through *The Waterways Journal* and placed a bet with himself that I had the makings of a riverman.

I went off to Point Pleasant with the conviction that I was going off to collect my laurels. My younger brother was wearing horn-rimmed glasses, going to college in the east, and had been invited to join a fraternity. My boy chums of high school days were writing letters from various colleges now. But what of that? By a short cut right across the grass I would come up ahead of the whole kit and kaboodle of them without opening a book, and would smell like river water in the bargain. Would it betray my own conscience to admit that in those days I actually went for walks on country roads pretending I was a towboat with nine barges ahead of me, and when I came to a curve I rang bells, stopped 'er, shipped up to back, waited until the proper moment and then set the 'scapes out on the roof and choo-chooed as the big sternwheel backed and "kicked" the tow around in safety?

"I'll not feel too very badly about saying good-bye," said Mother at the railroad station. "I have an uncanny feeling that you will be back home sooner than you think."

"We'll see," I purred knowingly, "and here is a big kiss that will have to last for a long time." . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

MY first day on the river was spent making an inventory, laboriously listing the contents of E. A.'s storeroom full of steamboat supplies, most of which were unfamiliar to me. Win helped me over the rough spots. "What's this?" I would ask him, holding out an article of hardware. "That's a drift bolt," he would explain, and laugh. "—And that is a barge spike." By evening my vocabulary was a maze of new terms and I was very alive to the fact that steamboats were constructed of strakes, futtocks, carlins, cod-wads, and fantails. So many odd things! Win blandly explained with appropriate gestures how to distinguish a male from a female syphon coupling. I blushed at this rare and priceless disclosure and nominated the rat tail bastard file as being the most honest and appropriately named instrument in the collection.

E. A. did not go home that evening: said he was going to put an end to the coal thieving which had been going on around the barge fleet at night. The Russian princess cooked supper down on the cook-boat moored close by; it was good, and I was entranced as she swirled around from stove to table, and table to shelf, and shelf to stove, chattering like a magpie about her royal days in Russia. Darkness descended on the Kanawha, the evening packet went up, and I concluded to thank God in my prayers that night for such a wonderful day of adventure. E. A. brought a muzzle-loading musket from a cupboard and filled it to the hilt with powder. He climbed to the roof of the office boat and told us to put out the lights and go to bed—my bed was in the office. Win told me to stay awake and watch the fun. He said the coal thieves lived close by and came in skiffs: they habitually appeared as soon as the stars were out, swiped coal all night, and retired when the sun came up. This was one of the principal industries of the neighborhood.

I crawled into my bed and waited. E. A. was directly overhead on the roof, and occasionally he shifted his position, and I could hear him clearing his throat. Otherwise the night was still save for the katydids and the frogs. By and by blump . . . blump . . . blump . . . blump . . . The muffled sound of oars working in oarlocks off across the water. It stopped. I sat bolt upright and listened.

In those days it was considered girlish to wear any sort of pajamas on the river; I had gleaned this information in advance and decided to follow the custom, so I was arrayed in a suit of long underwear—these late November nights were chilly.

No sound came for a long time. The suspense became unbearable so I crept from bed and stealthily felt my way to the outside door leading to the guard of the second deck.

It was fairly dark out there, and no person was in sight, so I stepped out of the door, shut it, and was instantly petrified to hear the night-latch click. I grasped the knob and gave it a heave: thunderation! I had locked myself out on the porch. It was a beautiful starlight night, with no moon, and the light mist from burning leaves hung over the placid, black waters of the Kanawha. Lights twinkled in the lockhouses upriver in the bend at Lock Eleven, and the government light on the ice pier above my new home glowed with a sleepy monotony. These things were peaceful enough: I was frantic. E. A. was snooping around up there on the roof and, like as not, the first sign of motion would bring forth a belch of shot from his musket.

There was a stairway leading from the main deck of the houseboat to my room. My problem was to drop over the railing and get down there to it. Chilled to the bone I looked below and after a time discovered a capstan on the main deck which would serve to light on as I swung down. It was easy enough when it was done and I didn't make enough noise to disturb a flea. Success! About the time I got within six yards of the stairs there came a rousing, surging B-O-O-M!! Then a crash overhead. The discharging musket kicked E. A. over backwards; he tripped on a guy-wire, and measured his length on the roof. . . .

CHAPTER SIX

THE *Gene Dana* was moored at the principal mine of the Campbell's Creek Coal Company up Kanawha River some seventy miles at Dana, West Virginia, and I "come to her" there.* This happened on a cold night in January, 1920. My nervous system was considerably jangled, for I had been en route for some eight hours, never in all of that time being able to convince myself that I would have enough nerve to confront Captain Joe. Mechanically I was transferring my body from one place to another place with ordinary facility; mentally I was jumping all over the universe, fighting a desire to run home and sometimes steeling myself to walk aboard that Kanawha River towboat. My feet finally delivered me on board: not my brain.

The *Gene Dana* was typical of hundreds of steamboats plying the Mississippi River and its tributaries: she was known as "pool-boat" type which, in river parlance, means the pilothouse was built forward of the cabin on the second deck, and not on top of it. She was a stern-wheeler, was designed to push barges and do sundry menial work, and was not equipped for passengers nor did she ever carry any freight on her decks—very much

the same as a tug in oceanwise service save that she never pulled barges behind her. All of the barges on western streams are gathered into a unit, securely lashed together with rope and wire, and the towboat is hitched to the rear of the mass and shoves it. "Towboat" is one of those idiotic terms on the western streams which does not mean what the word infers: the *Gene Dana* and her kin were not towboats; they were pushboats. A western boatman will only look at you in bewilderment if you speak of pushboats, however: he pushes with a towboat. The *Gene Dana* was 121 feet long, not counting her paddle-wheel which sprawled perhaps twenty additional feet to the rear, and she was 26 feet wide. You could wade in water she floated in and not get your pants pockets wet. Her hull was so extremely shallow that the deck, built on it, was perhaps four inches out of the water amidships and a careless pilot one time pulled the rudders hard over to miss a cake of floating ice and the boat careened to a precarious angle, darted for shore, straightened up, and when everybody had recovered his breath there was a block of river ice lodged in the engine room (not the one she swerved to avoid, but a close relative: both came from the Allegheny River). This boat was interesting in other ways.

The low deck built on top of the hull served as the floor for the engines and boilers and most of the equipment which had to do with her business of towing barges. The second deck, called the "boiler deck" (and never, since the inception of the western steamboat did it ever have a boiler on it) was made up into living quarters for the crew—this boat ran day and night and there had to be two pilots, two engineers, two mates, two firemen and two sets of deckhands: two of everybody save the cook and cabin help. These persons took turns sleeping in small rooms provided with upper and lower bunks and equipped just like a passenger boat. The pilothouse was built on the forward end of the cabin and could be entered from inside. Ahead of the pilothouse the twin smokestacks jutted through the boiler deck and went aloft about ten feet higher than the top of the pilothouse. This general scheme of construction was not thought up by a drunken man; on the contrary it was perfected to suit the particular needs of shallow river navigation and the *Gene Dana* and her brethren were as much at home on the Kanawha River as the *Queen Mary* is upon the sea.

I arrived in the cabin, a loafing area aft of the officers' staterooms (also the dining room three times a day), and five newspapers came down and five very different faces regarded me. "Hello, Captain Joe," I stated, and set down my suitcase.

Captain Joe looked like a Chinaman's conception of the Colossus of Rhodes. He eclipsed the huge hickory chair he sat in, or rather sprawled in, and dwarfed the four other husky men who were idling in the restricted confines of the white-painted cabin space. Captain Joe's pants usually were the fascinating focal point of his make-up, and they were this time, as he had a comfortable way of relieving stress and strain by popping open the first button and, as though that were a signal, several more would pop automatically. He never bothered to see how many: he would expand his middle, and wait for the succession of pops, and then kick his shoes off (they were never tied) and take aboard a cargo of chewing tobacco, roll his jaws around—but the rest is too awful.

Captain Joe shut one eye and looked at me out of the other. He could see better this way, and he always did it when he wished to make a critical study of a perplexing situation.

"What are you doing up here?" he mumbled.

By way of answer I produced the letter from Captain E. A. which carried instructions. Captain Joe took it,

*Western boatmen invariably express the thought: "I was hired at the office, directed to proceed to the boat to take up active duty aboard, and in due time arrived there safe and sound," by saying "I come to her."

opened it, and spent five minutes reading the seven lines of typewritten orders, and held the letter all the while so none of the other men in the cabin could possibly peek at it.

"Dern little use you'll be to me," he finally commented.

There was a vague silence.

"What do you know about steamboatin'?" he asked.

Rather this is an understandable translation of what he asked, for he didn't bother to open his mouth, and his words sounded like an engineer opening a mud drum valve.

A stockily built, black-haired fellow spoke up and said, "Oh, let him be, Cap; let the boy go to bed—he's had a big day getting here."

This was Charlie Young, the mate. Later I was to learn this fellow was a fair and square shooter who did extremely good work out on the barges. Customarily he was quiet and soft spoken and easy to get along with, but woe to Captain Joe if Charlie Young felt his crew wasn't getting right treatment, for "square deal" was his religion seven days a week.

To say that a strange and perplexed youngster felt grateful to Charlie Young that winter night would be putting the thought very mildly.

Captain Joe gripped the arms of his big chair and stared at a blank bulkhead. Charlie Young showed me my bunk and I crawled into it. Somebody out there in the cabin got up and poked the coal stove. Then I heard Captain Joe open up:

"If I don't have the godamdest luck," he mumbled. "I try to do right and get the boat along and then E. A. sends me a lily livered pup who never seen a steamboat to do my steering. Can you imagine that? I ain't blind: I know what it's all about. He thinks I'm stealing the groceries and sending stuff home, or else he thinks I'm padding the payroll and this cute stool pigeon he's sent up here will carry the news to him. I ain't dumb as I look. By God."

I heard this plainly. I hugged my pillow and somehow things suddenly seemed extremely funny and I had a fit of laughing to myself. Here I was, actually employed aboard a steamboat after years of dreaming of this very day. The *Gene Dana* was a poor compromise for such a palace as the *Queen City* had been in 1911, but maybe I could work up. Work up! By golly, I would work up!—And that bull-headed old fool out there in the cabin wasn't going to stop me, either: he'd gotten his orders and he'd better follow them. . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

OSTENSIBLY it was Captain Joe's job to learn me the river.* Actually, his chief concern was to devise some effective method of exterminating me, for I was gall of the bitterest sort to him, and he hated the sight of me. E. A. had ordered me there and Captain Joe was powerless to kick me off; consequently his method of attack had to be rigidly confined to tasks which a steamboat captain has the right to ask of a steersman in the proper line of duty. As long as I obeyed these commands and performed them to the best of my ability I had him, so to speak.

Immediately Captain Joe took a sudden interest in having the pilothouse cuspidors cleaned several times daily, and the floor mopped, and the windows cleaned. All the brass work about the bell trappings had to shine with radiance and splendor. Fingermarks on brass seemed to excite him into tantrums of rage. He also required many personal errands run for him.

*The word "teach" is not in a riverman's vocabulary.

The first morning on board, the *Gene Dana* was hitched onto a tow of coal and when she was almost ready to depart for down the river it occurred to Captain Joe that he had no toothpicks. He sent me flying to a store a half-mile away with a volume of invective, cut the boat loose, and started on down. Mr. Ransford, the company manager at Dana, saw this performance, and made Captain Joe maneuver the barges back alongside the fleet so I could jump aboard. "You old fossil, if you do that again I'll report you to E. A.," he admonished. I had won the tilt, but widened the breach to the point of open hostility.

There had been a two-foot snow over the countryside in this late January and when it got dark the first night out Captain Joe laid the boat up at some forsaken landing ten miles from nowhere for a high north wind. The crew gathered around the meager warmth of the cabin stove after supper. Captain Joe was the last to finish his meal, which he ate in silence (save for the slup-slop, smack-smack which accompanied every bite he laid hold upon) and finally he pushed his plate back with a sweep of his elbow and turned around in his chair. He shut one eye and trained the other around the cabin like a headlight until the glare spotted his objective. "Boy!" (This was his handle for me.) "Boy! Go find a telephone and tell Captain E. A. we're laid up for the night."

The temperature was two below zero. . . .

I asked Captain Joe where a telephone could be found and he roared, "You wouldn't look up a tree for a telephone, now, would you? You wouldn't look in a barn! There ain't no telephones in holler logs! Look in a house!" There was triumph in his open eye this time; he thought sure I would balk, and I would have balked, too, but for the circumstances.

AFTER putting on all the warm clothing I owned I waded up the inky black river bank and confronted wilderness in all directions. One way was as good as another so I set my course on a star and concluded to trust to dumb luck. About the time one ear felt frozen and all feeling had left my hands I finally did see an oil lamp shining from the window of a big, gloomy house amid a cluster of snow-laden pine trees. My heart leaped with joy when I ran afoul of a dilapidated telephone pole and saw wires strung to it. Falling and stumbling I clambered up the front steps and pounded on the door. There was some commotion inside and presently an old lady wrapped in shawls and blankets appeared. "We got smallpox in here," she said, and looked at me bleakly. "Ever had it?"

I said I was sorry to trouble her and inquired if there was a telephone handy. She said there was none for ten miles, and she doubted if I could raise "nobody" on hers. It developed her phone was in a big, cold hallway; only one room in the house was heated and in it lay a man with smallpox. I took chances and cranked up her phone, and shouted into it, and pounded it, until there came a glow of life into its working parts and a faint voice through the receiver said: "Operator."

"I'd like to get Captain E. A."

Down in that country you never asked for a number; just stated the name of the person you wanted.

The telephone girl said, "Freddy Way—what on earth are you doing in that house? There's smallpox in there! E. A. is over at the barber shop and they haven't got a phone. He's going to stop by the hotel before he goes home, so give me your message and I'll get it to him. Then you skedaddle out of that house. Hear?"

The Point Pleasant exchange long has been noted for service: not long ago there was a picture in the *National Geographic* magazine of Gertrude Howard sitting on a raft in there plugging away with flood water waist-deep all around her.

On the way back to the boat I was hoping that a couple of smallpox germs might have lingered with me, and that they would take a shine to Captain Joe, but when I got there he had gone to bed, and was out of harm's way, and nothing came of it.

Working on the *Gene Dana* was not an entirely safe occupation. One night we were coming up through Elk Chute with nine empty barges. The *D. T. Lane* was on our trail, with a similar tow, and she was plugging along behind us and seemed to be gaining. Elk Chute was a narrow channel immediately below Charleston where the bulk of the river's current was funneled by an arrangement of stone dikes: the water fell through this place so swiftly that the *Gene Dana* could not stem it. She needed help: she got it in two ways: the mate led a manila line away up the dike and secured it to a ringbolt, then brought the other end down aboard the steamboat and wound it around a capstan (an upright spool on the forecandle) and set the capstan on "double purchase" and commenced winding up the rope on it, thereby dragging the *Gene Dana* and her tow upstream. The other help came from the steamboat itself; Captain Joe called down through the pilothouse speaking trumpet to the engine room and said to the engineer, "Tickle her a little, Bill."

This Bill was the chief engineer, locally known as Dynamite Bill and there was a handful of deckhands and chambermaids who would not ride on the same boat with him—and there were two-score more who would not ride on any boat where Captain Joe was in command and Dynamite Bill was at the throttle—the combination was akin to adding a lighted match to pure hydrogen. I was blissfully ignorant of these things.

Presently I noted with some satisfaction that the *Gene Dana* seemed to be taking a more vigorous interest in climbing up through the chute: she 'scaped with explosive puffs and the floor of the pilothouse trembled and the sash rattled, and there was a sensation of enormous power being expended. The *Lane* commenced to drop further behind, and this was miraculous, for she was far more powerful than the *Gene Dana*. "We're getting along great," I confided to Captain Joe. He worked the steering levers in a continual see-saw, back and forth, back and forth. "Keep your hat on," he mumbled. Then there came an unearthly wheeze through the smokestacks and the engines stopped.

Captain Joe jumped back involuntarily and upset the pilothouse stool; he grabbed me by the shoulder and roared: "Listen, boy; go straight to the engine room and see what's the matter: then come back here as fast as you can fly! Quick!"

Thoroughly alarmed I ran down the front stairway to the forecandle and wheeled around past the firebox. Here I met an oncoming army of deckhands, all of them running forward as fast as their legs could carry them, shouting "Git to the barges if you keer fur y'r lives!"

Pure curiosity carried me back to the engine room in record time. Dynamite Bill was into the boiler feed pump with both arms and legs, working with the fury of a demon.

"What's the matter?" I yelled.

The watchman, hopping around amid a welter of wrenches, shouted. "Boilers white hot and no water in 'em—and you want to know what's—"

I never heard the rest of it.

"Haul the fires!" bellowed Captain Joe when I confirmed his suspicions with stammered, disjointed exclamations. "Git out a line!"

The *Gene Dana*, according to hearsay evidence afterward, had been carrying in the neighborhood of 400 pounds of steam to the square inch of her boiler surface when this excitement started. She was legally allowed some nominal amount—something around 200 pounds. Dynamite Bill had "tickled her" by weighting down the

safety valve with a few stray grate bars. Then the "doctor" pump stalled and all that sizzling white heat vaporized the water in the boilers into froth and foam. Two nervy firemen pulled the roaring coal fires out of her furnaces and sloshed spitting, glowing coals down the ash chute into the river. In a few moments the *Gene Dana* was moored to the shore, cold and dead as a corpse.

The cook said that Captain Joe and Dynamite Bill eventually would ride to hell amid a rip-roaring explosion astride a ten-inch flue. I pondered the advisability of being on the tail of such a novel kite.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BUT I stuck with the job, although it is hard to comprehend just why: after three months on the *Gene Dana* I didn't know anything more about Kanawha River navigation than a mud turtle; Captain Joe saw to that. He wouldn't allow me so much as to take hold of the steering levers. I remonstrated and he said, "Cub pilots that learn anything from me generally put five dollars under my pillow on pay day." This meant twenty dollars a month, and it was too much, so I continued to stand by his side while he was on watch. He wouldn't let me sit down while the boat was under way; said I could never learn anything "settin' around."

It was my task to kill him or cure him; this state of things could not go on forever. An opportunity presented itself presently.

Among my routine tasks was the job of keeping the time book and making out the pay checks. At the end of each month I was required to stop off at the Point Pleasant office for several days and draw up recapitulation wage sheets which were forwarded to the main office in Cincinnati. In the pursuit of these duties I was well aware of the fact that Captain Joe was getting forty dollars less a month than the other steamboat captains in the line. One day while so engaged in the office I asked Captain E. A. if he didn't think that Captain Joe deserved a raise to the level of the others. To my utter astonishment he said, "Yes, he ought to have it—give it to him."

When the *Gene Dana* came in next time I had the supreme satisfaction of handing Captain Joe his check. His one bad eye went shut as he scrutinized the figure written upon it, then he looked at me in consternation. I explained what was the matter, and took care to shove my part of the transaction into the limelight. It was a Joe Louis knockout. For the next two weeks he would not let me out of his sight, took me uptown with him in Charleston and bought me a Coca-Cola, allowed me no peace or freedom of my own, and said I was his pal.

This was an honor, in a way, for Captain Joe was an amazing fellow; he had driven his way through life with sheer doggedness, cussedness, and brute determination. For years he had held berths as captain on the biggest towboats bringing coal out of Pittsburgh: he had always been a taskmaster of the most severe sort. Three times towboats had blown to atoms under him, in boiler explosions, and three times he had gone hurtling into thin air and come down clutching to splintered wood and saved himself. Much as I shrank from his personal habits, I always was awe-struck at his nerve and his capacity to drive men, and his apparent total lack of human feeling. Now I had succeeded in melting his stubborn heart; this triumph may have made a commotion in heaven and gladdened the hearts of some angels, but nobody in heaven had to live with the old lugger: that was my job, and it got irksome. I asked E. A. if I might come back to the Point Pleasant office and take up my clerical duties again. E. A. was amiable enough, and allowed me to do this: two weeks later he fired me.

The reason I got fired was simple enough, and won't take long to tell. One of E. A.'s nightly habits was to sit down to his old-fashioned typewriter and peck out a letter to one of the principal owners of the coal company. This was grueling work for E. A. inasmuch as his experience in dealing with typewriters was self-inflicted. He curled his fingers into two fists, extending only the index fingers; with these he struck the various keys with a slow, dolorous cadence which, to an expert typist, would have been a refined oriental torture. E. A. perspired, opened his mouth for relief, ate apples and went groggily through this nightly ritual—sometimes filling three or four pages of paper with single-spaced communication. Frequently this job took two and a half hours. If he managed to get the carbon paper in backwards and had to do a page over again, he had to make arrangements to stay all night. Inflexible and undeviating was his rule to do all of this job personally: nobody at the office was permitted to peek at these confidential outpourings. The carbon copies were locked in a huge cabinet which, for a year or so, had taken all cargo without a hint of remonstrance: by 1919 when I appeared on the scene it was bulging and about ready to vomit. One night he finished up, put the carbon copy in the cabinet, slammed the door and it failed to lock. After E. A. had gone home, a female secretary who had appeared on the job discovered this filing case stretched open in luxurious relief.

I have not mentioned the "lady secretaries" who came and went at the Point Pleasant landing of this coal company solely because they never stayed long enough to get acquainted with; in the six or eight months while I was there, perhaps eight or ten of them arrived full of hope and cheer and got along tolerably well for a day or so until they ruffled E. A.'s feathers by some feminine act which enraged him—then off they'd be packed with sniffles and sobs and red noses.

This lady's name has escaped me; she hailed from Harlan County, Kentucky. She smelled of hickory smoke and drank her whisky standing up. She volunteered to take E. A.'s shotgun and make short work of the coal thieves, but E. A. wouldn't hear to it. This lady was tall, gaunt, and some mysterious age between thirty and fifty. She wore horn-rimmed glasses and had red hair. This is more description than she deserves: to get down to cases, she had two bony hands in that private file barely ten minutes after E. A. went home that night.

One of the letters, written a day or so previously, used up several paragraphs denouncing one of the steamboat captains of the line; I think Captain Miller of the *D. T. Lane*. E. A. had verbally ripped this fellow up and down the back to his "boss" in Cincinnati. This dear lady secretary folded the carbon copy up and handed it to me: told me if I had any manhood I'd take it and show it to Captain Miller so he could protect himself against this injustice (her words) which had been done. Being an upright Christian youth I saw here a golden opportunity to correct an unscrupulous slur on an honest man's character, so I said, "I will do that."

In bed that night I pondered the wisdom of this procedure and got up, placed the letter back in the file, and rid my hands of the business. In a day or so, Captain E. A. called me out on the guard privately and showed me the folded carbon copy. He asked me if I had any knowledge of how it came to be folded. The inquisition went along and I got in deeper water momentarily and finally he said, "I'm terribly sorry, but my faith in you is shaken; we must part." The redhead had rattled a warped version of the affair to E. A. He had believed what she told him. I was so stunned at the outcome that I did not remonstrate, and commenced packing my clothes.

My arrival back home wasn't going to be the victory march I had dreamed of seven months ago: seven months

on the Kanawha River and there was one stretch of four months in that period when I didn't take a bath for the plain reason there was never opportunity to get near a bathtub. My towboat days were over. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE business of manufacturing new steamboat pilots was not in assembly line production in 1920, nor had it been for some years prior. The reasons for this may be condensed into a short story by reviewing, briefly, the main events which had come to pass since my first trip to Cincinnati on the great *Queen City* in 1911.

Eb Cline did not exaggerate when he said that one company owned fifty or sixty towboats and ran them between Pittsburgh and New Orleans. In those days coal was loaded in wooden barges and frail "coal boats" and moored in vast fleets at strategic points along the upper Ohio River; sometimes, when the summer droughts were prolonged, these awaiting coal cargoes arrived at totals of 10,000,000 bushels, occasionally much more than that. By latter September the Pittsburgh harbor had turned into acres and acres of floating coal fleets, and narrow lanes were left for steamboats to squeeze up through the Monongahela River's mouth and harbor.

In early October great preparations were made for the transportation of these cargoes to southern markets, inasmuch as Louisville, Evansville, Paducah, Cairo, Memphis, Vicksburg, New Orleans and all of the labyrinth bayou country west of the Mississippi in Louisiana was dependent on Pennsylvania coal. The safe conduct of these fleets was dependent on the weatherman—he must provide rain and an ample "raise" in the river. The steamboat fraternity had to be ready when the rains came, for the upper Ohio is fed by contributions from the Allegheny and the Monongahela, two great "creeks" which have all of the attributes of creeks, and all of the deficiencies: they "pop up" over night to create a boating stage and then subside with great rapidity—frequently all of the awaiting coal had to be set in transit within a forty-eight-hour period, or be left stranded.

Frequently a suitable raise materialized before November, but if it didn't, the annual "Thanksgiving raise" could be depended on and hundreds of rivermen would eat their turkey in steamboat cabins instead of with their families. One of the seven wonders of the modern world was a view of the activity in the Pittsburgh harbor while the boats were hitched to their assigned barges and cleared from the landings. Perhaps thirty steamboats belched smoke and steam, and deckhands, firemen, officers and laborers swarmed over the wharves and on the fleets. Grocery and meat trucks and wagons delivered last minute stores; great coils of manila line were rolled aboard; men shouted and swore excited oaths—and usually a drizzling rain beat down and wet everything but nobody cared—this rain was a welcome break to end the summer's droning monotony.

As soon as the gauge on the Point Bridge at Pittsburgh indicated barge water, the first tow backed out and straightened downstream. The shallow draught barges went first, skimming along on the head of the raise. As the stage of the river increased, the deeper laden coal boats were brought out: all of this was done on hair-trigger schedule: every fifteen minutes a steamboat with a tow of coal started southward. If the raise had earmarks of being prolonged, the schedule was tamed down somewhat—maybe a boat an hour.

The natives of the Ohio valley turned out to watch this great parade. The names of the towboats were commonplace household terms. The *Jos. B. Williams* and the *John A. Wood* were two of the largest which

visited Pittsburgh regularly, although the great *Sprague* had been in the harbor twice in her career, but she usually stayed below Louisville and on the Mississippi. The Brown boats could be identified by great gold anchors swung between their smokestacks; the *Alice Brown*, *Harry Brown*, *Sam Brown*, *Charles Brown*. The big *J. B. Finley* had hog-chains like the *Queen City*, somewhat, and could easily be identified a mile away. Somewhat smaller, but none the less trim, were the *Valiant*, *Exporter*, *Coal City*, *Enterprise*, *Jim Wood*, *J. A. Donaldson*, *Raymond Horner*, *Samuel Clarke*, *Tom Dodsworth*, *W. K. Field*, and a score more like them. The great *Boaz* was watched with interest, too. As a usual rule, one of the "great" boats was despatched with half of her tow; the other half was brought along a few moments later by a pool-boat built *Gene Dana* style—there were thirty such around Pittsburgh. So divided, the two sections were guided to points below the narrow Steubenville, Bellaire and Parkersburg railroad bridge spans, then the "great" boat took the whole of the tow and went on south with it, and the pool-boat returned scampering to Pittsburgh to assist another tow upon its way.

This exciting pageant was in full bloom in 1911 when I first appeared upon the scene, and many a day I have stood along the river banks at my home town watching the spectacle of the coal fleets sweeping by. I played hockey from school to do so.

Suddenly, almost without warning, this whole scheme ceased to be. The popular opinion along the rivers was that Andy Mellon or Andrew Carnegie was responsible—that these gentlemen, with their vast financial power, had reached out and stopped the flow of Pittsburgh's coal to the southern markets in order that sufficient supplies of fuel could be reserved for local mills. This idea was a general one, and may have had some foundation of truth; nevertheless, by 1918, it was no uncommon sight to view one of the "great" boats moored to the shore, her smokestacks rusted through and fallen down, her decks warped, paint peeled off, and—as rivermen termed it—in the boneyard. In less than a decade, jobs for rivermen vanished to the point of extinction: some one hundred "towboat pilots" who had been high-and-mighty now were sitting on drift logs, literally, wondering what was coming next.

THE packet trade had slumped almost as alarmingly as towboat business. The *Queen City*, pride of Pittsburgh's rivers in 1911, clung to her routine trade between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati until 1914, playing tag with U. S. marshals, and her owners in the throes of receivership. She made a final grandstand play by loading a cargo of freight and passengers at Pittsburgh in early 1914 destined for the New Orleans Mardi Gras. While rounding to at Louisville on the downbound trip, she managed to "saddle-bag" a pier in the river there, punctured a hole in her hull, and sank. Nobody was hurt, and eventually she was raised from her precarious position, but she did not attempt to operate again; her owners tied her up in the mouth of the Great Kanawha River, almost abreast of Captain E. A.'s landing fleet, and allowed her to repose in idleness. Smaller packets attempted to clutch at the remains of the *Queen City's* trade, but the attempt, however honest, was a feeble imitation of the real thing.

The feeling was universal by 1917 that the glory of river traffic actually had died a lingering death and was no more. As though "Ole Man River" realized the situation, and accepted it, an unprecedented ice gorge roared down the whole length of the Ohio that winter and destroyed nearly all of the great packets and a number of the towboats which still existed. The spring of 1918 came around with a river barren of traffic, devoid

of boats. Congressmen cried "pork barrell!" when appropriations for river improvement were suggested and only a lone handful of persons clung to a vision of the stream's future worth.

The disruption of railroad traffic by strike and embargo was the electric shock which brought with it an acute realization that the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the major tributaries should be developed into a modern artery of commerce. One morning the Carnegie Steel Company announced its intention to build a fleet of towboats and barges—not one or two, but a dozen or more. The Standard Oil Company hunted up the old *John A. Wood*, the *Sprague*, the *James Moren* and other old coal pushers and organized a river transportation scheme. A group of Wheeling businessmen banded together and formed the Liberty Line and commenced a revival of the packet trades. The United States government formed a barge line on the Mississippi to experiment with the possibilities. Private barge lines sprang up along the Ohio, and the *General Beach*, in 1920, passed many a tow of barges laden with pipe, nails, wire, steel—destined for Memphis and New Orleans. In this rebirth, the fabulous coal traffic was missing—dead as a dodo. In its place, local Pittsburgh mills feverishly built river docks and terminals, and commenced receiving their fuel by river and now—twenty years later—Pittsburgh's waterborne coal traffic exceeds even the palmy days of the *John A. Wood*, although not a lump of the fuel goes south of Bellaire, Ohio, ninety-two miles down the Ohio. Even if the great coal fleets had persisted, they would have failed anyhow—fuel oil today is the prevailing fuel in the south country.

Most of the steamboat pilots were wearing shiny serge and patched pants in 1920 while I was aboard the *General Beach*; they were pulling down some fancy wages, those of the clan who were lucky enough to have jobs, but pilots were plentiful and jobs were scarce. The prospect of becoming a cub pilot and learning the profession was slim: every pilot harbored a primitive and strong feeling that new blood would only serve to disrupt the existing wage scale and cause further unemployment. The great Pilot's Association was the laughing-stock of the river, housed in a dimly lit room in a corner of Pittsburgh's Monongahela House, a visiting place to swap yarns, a museum of former grandeur. Dictatorial organizations, such as this one, only survive and thrive when business is on the upswing: at the first suggestion of hard times it crumbled to dust and became as nothing.

If I had ambitions to become a pilot then I must learn the river in piecemeal fashion, tending primarily to my clerking job and managing to slip to the pilothouse occasionally for a hurried lesson or so. I made no "arrangement" with Eb Cline or anybody else about this; simply kept on good terms with the pilots and tried to profit by what crumbs were cast my way. My hunger for steering information kept me constantly busy digesting pilot marks and crossings; hence my ability as a freight clerk soon suffered somewhat from a serious lack of nourishment.

One morning we arrived at Steubenville, downbound, with forty barrels of root beer on the head of the boat. Twenty of them were consigned to Steubenville and the remainder went to Wellsburg, six miles below. I had been up in the pilothouse watching Eb run the Panhandle Bridge span, and hurried to the office just in time to grab up the discharging book and the bills, as the boat rounded to and touched the wharfboat.

The *General Beach* was short handed on deck; there were only four or five roustabouts. In those boom days every laborer who could lift a shovel was getting a princely salary working somewhere other than on a steamboat. The mate begged and cajoled the wharfmaster at Steubenville to allow him to unload the twenty barrels of

root beer on the whariboat, but the wharfmaster, Pud Thornily, would have none of it, and cried: "Out on the hill with it, or roll them back on the steamboat!"

This was the law, and there was no getting around it, for Pud Thornily owned the whariboat at Steubenville and was master of what went on around it. So the mate and those poor, broken-spirited roustabouts slaved for a half-hour getting the twenty clumsy barrels shoved and pushed and rolled up the cobblestone grade, a distance of seventy-five or eighty feet. Pud Thornily had a strict rule that any freight which would stand exposure to weather did not need housing aboard his whariboat, which was cramped for space anyhow: root beer came under this general heading.

After the job was completed, I went out and counted the barrels and recounted them, backwards, sideways, up and down, and fetched up with twenty every time; no mistake about it. So I drew a big pencilled circle in the discharging book over the item and heaved a sigh—or started to—when I observed that my partner clerk had added a little notation in the book which said, "Steubenville barrels of root beer have white tags on head: Wellsburg barrels have red tags." I froze with paralysis, and my heart came in my mouth, and for a few moments I dared not look.

Oh, my; oh, my! The tags were red, of course—that was the general run of my luck. Thirty minutes of grueling work gone up in smoke.

I had presence of mind enough not to run down and tell the mate what had happened—natural instinct of self-preservation attended to that—for he would have clubbed me to death with the first thing handy and heavy enough. I slipped upstairs on the steamboat and wakened my clerk partner and told him what a crime I had committed and begged him for advice.

"You'd better just start running," he said, "before that mate finds out."

But I set my jaw for it, and went out on the river bank, and asked the mate to come out there where there was plenty of room.

"Those barrels we just put off belong at Wellsburg," I said bluntly, and got ready to sprint.

The results were strictly up to expectation. Before that mate got through delivering himself of the venom which had been accumulating in his system ever since I arrived aboard the boat, a great audience had arrived to stand at respectful distance and admire the man's vocabulary. The twenty-odd houses of ill fame which have lined the river front at Steubenville from time immemorial emptied themselves of blondes, brunettes and other patterns and stripes; not having had notice, they appeared in odd costume, some in swimming suits, others in negligees, a few in laced bathrobes—one stood in a doorway with step-ins and brassiere. The assorted clientele to which these girls catered was there also—a group of ruffians and braggadocios who considered themselves masters of such arts as profanity: all of them froze to attitudes of rapt attention in the presence of such elegant and masterful delivery. The mate paced around on his great stone platform, waved his arms, and made the air blue; he traced my ancestry to questionable forebears, inspected my intelligence bit by bit, and summed up his opinions of me, and of clerks in general, and of the steamboat business, and of whariboats and wharfmasters, and of the governor of the state of Ohio, and of other states, and finally of the Congress.

Exhausted, he threw his arms upward in a gesture of helplessness, and ordered the roustabouts to roll the barrels back aboard the steamboat.

Order was again restored, and the populations who inhabited the shoddy houses went back to their affairs, declaring they had never seen the like, and doubted if they ever would again in this mortal life.

THE mate's berating was an offense to my personal vanity. I told my partner clerk to find somebody else to take my place, for my mind had been made up to quit. He told me to get a shovel and bash the mate across the side of his head with it, and get over the grouch and go on doing my work. I judged my physical build would not succeed in such an experiment, however delightful it sounded, and told my partner once more to find another man. My strategy lay in the hopes they would fire the mate and keep me, and I allowed myself many moments of pleasure in contemplation of such sweet revenge. Within a week a new clerk did arrive, and my final pay was counted out to me. I had neglected to foresee that an experienced mate was more valuable to the steamboat than a dud-headed clerk who paid scant attention to his duties and spent a greater portion of the time riding in the pilothouse.

The *General Beach* went down the river that night without me and I felt very lonesome. My mother was glad to see me but her joy did not overcome her practical nature and she asked me to place my suitcase in the cellar where it could be opened without contaminating the house, and to take a bath, leaving my clothes on the center of the tile floor where they could be gathered up with a dust pan and broom. Her horror of bedbugs was unbounded, although I don't believe she ever saw a fat, juicy one in her lifetime.

It occurred to me that I would make a date with a girl that evening, a very special girl of high school days, and ride around in the moonlight. The months and months of cramped activity on the river allowed me to give way, for a moment, to a feeling of luxury at the mere fact of walking on soft, springy grass around our home. The beauty of trees and gardens, and of quiet and solitude struck me with overpowering significance. Nobody was going to rustle me out of bed in the middle of the night to "come on watch." Yes, I would call on this young lady, and we would talk softly of the strangeness of life; hand in hand we would walk through the rose gardens: I would pick one for her and tell her she was sweeter than any rose that ever bloomed. I would tell her that I was the loser for not having written her more often, but that was because I was busy on the river. She would understand.

Reality has a way of bluntness about it: when I called "her" number my heart was skipping and my hands trembled: "her" mother answered and, in the sweetest, most friendly conversation, informed me that the young lady was married and living in the east.

As lame consolation, I judged I would ask my brother to go to the movies and was about to do so when he appeared in white flannels, hopped in the Buick, and sped down the driveway to pick up his date for the evening. Mother was in the living room playing the piano, practicing a new piece she had bought called "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Dear, Old Dad." This tune was familiar to me; we had played it in the high school Mandolin Club.

"Come on," said Mother, "help me plunk out this tune."

The mandolin was still on top of the piano, where it had been for several years. The pick was wedged in its proper place and, after a little tuning, we went to work on "I Want a Girl."

"Grand!" applauded Mother when we went through the fifth time without serious hitches. "Let's sing it this time."

"I want a girl. . . ."

The moon was peeping through the maple trees outside. A luxurious quiet pervaded the world out there. Somewhere away over east a girl was married and living with a husband. Down toward the west flowed the river.

The *General Beach* was chuff-chuffing along past a twinkling government light, her red and green signal lights glowing on her smokestacks. What did I possess of this? A wooden mandolin and a celluloid pick.

"Mother," I said quietly, "I have made my mind up to something. I'm going to college like you want me to."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I ENROLLED at the University of Cincinnati for two reasons, both equally good ones. This institution offered a cooperative course in which an engineering student pursued his academic work for a two-week period and spent the next two weeks working in a factory in order to gain practical experience, the student drawing a salary while so employed. I cannot imagine a more satisfactory scheme for any person with ambitions to absorb a working knowledge of mechanics and machines.

Through the winter months of 1920-21 I became acquainted with lathes, the drill press, milling machines, and many of the machinist's tools and short cuts. The weeks spent in several manufacturing plants in Cincinnati were thoroughly enjoyable and entirely profitable.

The other reason for the choice lay in the fact that Cincinnati is a river town and always has had a lion's share of steamboat activity. Every evening boats cleared the wharves for Louisville, Maysville, Pomeroy and Charleston. The *General Wood* left once a week for Pittsburgh. Every Saturday noon I left the school, or the job, hurried to my rooms, loaded a grip with a clean shirt and a toothbrush, and took off for the river. There was always a thrilling choice of whether to go up the Ohio on a Greene Line packet, or take a Mail Line steamer toward the south; sometimes I went one way, sometimes the other, usually managing to get back bright and early on Monday morning to resume studies.

Captain Gordon C. Greene owned the control of the Greene Line in those days and he had a fleet of five or six steamboats: he was a tall, rough-shod fellow, slow of speech, honest as the day was long, and in addition to managing these boats he stood a regular pilot's watch on the *Greenwood*. Sometimes the *Greenwood* sailed up-river on a Friday night, and when this happened, I skipped the Saturday morning classes in order to be aboard with him. Captain Greene loved to have somebody steer for him, and this suited my taste, and he would give me the wheel and settle back in his favorite chair and promptly go to sleep. He never would allow me to pay any fare, saying, "It don't cost me anything to ride you around; the cook would throw what you eat down the dollar-hole anyhow, so make yourself welcome."*

When the warm spring days came, the temptation to ride with Captain Greene became overpowering at times, and I once took a whole week off with "French leave" from school to go clear up to Charleston and back. I found myself up in front of the Dean one morning, attempting to formulate reasonable explanations for low marks and unexplained absences. I looked upon this Dean as my old enemy, the mate, in a new guise: we did not agree on any of the subjects he insisted on talking about. Moreover, the morning Pittsburgh *Post*, to which I subscribed because of the lengthy river news column, had announced a bewitching scheme that very morning; the *General Beach* was going to enter a new trade. She was going to ply between Pittsburgh and Zanesville, making one round trip a week. This meant going down the Ohio at Marietta, thence up the beautiful Muskingum

about seventy-five miles, for Zanesville is located near the head of navigation on that stream. I had not allowed myself any paroxysm of joy over this news until I read that she was coming out with an entirely new crew, *mate and all*. What the Dean of the University of Cincinnati had to say after that was of secondary importance. My job was to get to a telegraph office and apply for the position of clerk on the *General Beach*.

There is a lingering suspicion in my mind that I did not finish all of the freshman final examinations in early June, 1921, but this may be a wrong impression; perhaps I did finish them. One of the students was going back to his home in Washington, D.C., and I persuaded him to get aboard the *General Wood* and ride up the Ohio River to Pittsburgh: this boy, Austin Winant by name, was a scrupulous and thorough student, and filled with good humor. I am convinced he lingered at the University long enough to complete all of the freshman requirements and, inasmuch as we left Cincinnati together, the deduction is in my favor: I must have passed the grades.

Austin and I spent three thoroughly enjoyable days going up the Ohio River; his was the fun of seeing new things; mine was in pointing out the river and its boats to this school friend and seeing his enthusiasm. We parted at Pittsburgh, after having spent the entire winter together, and I have never seen him since that time. Regularly, every Christmas, he sends me a greeting which has no address on it other than Washington, D.C., and my cards to him have been returned, always, with the notation "insufficient address." This one-way Pyramus and Thisbe yearly communication has been going on for twenty years.

The *General Beach* had undergone a thorough house cleaning and was painted snow white. Every last soul who had worked on her in the Wheeling trade had been broomed off, Ebenezer Cline and all. The new mate was a portly, red-faced individual who blushed when anybody talked up a woman's leg farther than her ankle; the captain was an ex-butcher from Parkersburg with an air of refinement; the head clerk was a fat boy a few years my senior brimful of human kindness, and now she carried two pilots—one of them a wispy, slight little man about sixty years old who looked as though he might blow away in the first windstorm, and the other was a more or less harum-scarum, short-built man of about thirty-five who was full of practical jokes and barnyard humor.

Mr. J. W. Brown still was the general manager, although his offices had been moved to rooms in a Pittsburgh office building, and the headquarters were not at Wheeling any more. In response to my feverish telegram he had answered to advise me to apply directly to the head clerk on the *Beach*, which I promptly did, and was hired. Mr. Brown had selected the crew of the *General Beach* with infinite care, for she was moving into new territory and the success of any packet is largely due to the personal element: a few roughly spoken words by a mate, or clerk, to a shipper of river freight can result in the instant withdrawal of much business. Mr. Brown considered his choices, judged each selection with the double idea of having a competent crew and a good set of advance agents and salesmen to boot. He had to be particularly careful on this occasion inasmuch as the *General Beach* was confronted with opposition; a packet named *Liberty* had entrenched herself in the Pittsburgh and Zanesville route the winter before, and had built up a good independent trade.

The Muskingum River merchants and hucksters and millers of flour took great interest in this rebirth of the steamboat business upon their stream; for eight years there had been no regular packet between Pittsburgh and Zanesville. The last boat which had plied there, the

* Every steamboat pantry, those days, was equipped with a large tin funnel leading overboard for the disposal of garbage: it was called "dollar-hole" for much wasted food was dumped in it.

Lorena (named to honor the heroine of a poem which went "A Hundred Months have Passed, Lorena, Since I Last Held Thy Hand in Mine," etc.) had been driven out in the spring of 1913 when the Muskingum valley was deluged with a terrible flood, disrupting the lock and dam system and the canals. Both the *Liberty* and the *General Beach* found plenty to do, and a considerable commerce.

Navigation on the Muskingum had all of the spice of riding on a narrow-gauge railroad, for everything was in miniature up there: the stream itself was shallow and narrow and walled, here and there, with picturesque bluffs. The bottomlands were fertile and green and a farmer's Utopia, but on a small scale compared to the Ohio River's vast reaches. The small stone locks, which admitted traffic around the stationary dams, were 158 feet long and 35.8 feet wide, and inasmuch as the *General Beach* was about 150 by 35, she squeezed in with precious little room to spare; had she been only a foot wider or several feet longer, she could not have plied the stream. These locks, ten in number (although there was an additional one above Zanesville which we did not see or use) had been in operation since 1841, and the gates were as primitive as those used on the early-day canals, being built of heavy timbers and operated by manpower. Originally the river had been canalized with a through canal system to the north connecting to Lake Erie; the entire project was built by the state of Ohio, and tolls were collected. The locks and dams in the Muskingum were not turned over to the U. S. government until 1887. At several points along the route, the *General Beach* was required to leave the river altogether, and go through narrow canals which bordered the stream: several of these ran virtually through the main streets of small towns and the one at Zanesville led into the principal business district of the city. I cannot imagine a more captivating and continually interesting steamboat voyage—the Muskingum was a rare dream and a true state of being all rolled up into one. Occasionally the *General Beach* had to be stopped in the canals until houseboat owners could shoo their ducks and geese out of the path of the steamboat.

In addition to these things, the bridges which spanned the Muskingum were too low to allow the *Beach's* passage under them, and all were provided with spans which swung around, or lifted up, same as in Chicago River. One hot day the *Beach* was ready to back out of the Zanesville canal and the traffic bridge just below refused to lift, having become expanded by the unusual summer heat and pressed securely shut. We had to call the fire department and wait until they ran hose lines, sprayed the span with cold water, and contracted the steel structure until it would function normally.

Only one of our pilots had a license to navigate the Muskingum, so while we were up there the *Beach* ran in daylight only, laying up for the night wherever she happened to be, and the head clerk and I enjoyed many a night swim, naked as jaybirds, along the gravel beaches and willow-fringed shores. The electric light plant usually was shut down shortly after nightfall aboard the boat, inasmuch as a peculiar pest locally called "May fly" swarmed to lighted places and the decks had to be swept of the dead multitudes in the mornings. Although the *Beach* was a "work house" with her enormous local

trade on the Muskingum, I don't believe I ever spent a more enjoyable two months than in June and July of 1921 while we ran there.*

All good things must end, and the *Beach* withdrew from her novel trade. Mr. Brown had contracted to deliver pipe and steel to a mill down at Hanging Rock, Ohio, and considered there was more profit in harnessing the *General Beach* in that service. She was to become a glorified towboat. She needed no clerks. Mr. Brown asked me to assist him in his Pittsburgh office, hinting that there was prospect of an opening as clerk on one of his other steamers. Work in a city office was humdrum business after the glorious Muskingum, but I went along with his suggestion, wondering what was in store.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ON Tuesday, July 26, 1921, Captain Guthrie walked into Mr. Brown's office and the two of them had a serious conversation. Since the night Captain Guthrie took me aboard the *General Crowder* when I left the employ of Captain E. A., he had continued as master of Liberty Line boats plying between Pittsburgh and Charleston: the *Crowder* now was at the docks at Point Pleasant, West Virginia, getting a new hull and other repairs, and a smaller boat, the *General Pershing*, was in her place; Captain Guthrie was now in charge of the *Pershing*.

It seems the third clerk on the *Pershing* had been suspected of stealing money from the boat's safe. He was not very adroit in his alleged purloinings: he had stolen nothing but quarters—took them by the roll (or so the evidence indicated) and did not touch anything else. Captain Guthrie had turned sleuth and followed a trail of twenty-five-cent pieces in this clerk's wake through a series of restaurants and saloons. He wanted to fire the clerk and secure somebody to take his place. Fifteen minutes later I was hired to go aboard the *General Pershing* as third clerk.

This steamboat had a lively trade in hauling cows, sheep, cattle, chickens, ducks, calves, horses, mules, eggs, and the things which go with such stuff—blue-bottle flies by the horde, ants, roaches, ticks, lice, rats, bugs. On a still night the *General Pershing* was audible three miles away—she was a floating barnyard, and Noah would have been proud of her, for she was alive with the stomping, crawling, and creeping things of the earth. If General Pershing was proud of his namesake, he never said so, nor do I know for certain whether he was ever aware of the honor which had been done his name. This also was true of General Leonard Wood, General Enoch Crowder and General Lansing Beach: no one of them ever evidenced one iota of interest in these steamboats which had been called after them.

The transportation of farm goods was very profitable and the *General Pershing* was called a "huckster boat" inasmuch as she peddled from one side of the river to the other, picking up a cow here, and a case of eggs there, making sometimes twenty or thirty landings on a watch. Most of her accumulations were consigned to Wheeling and Pittsburgh. A clerk's work, by necessity, was largely of a barnyard character; he had to know a heifer from a yearling and be able to look into the face of a calf and recognize who owned it; he had to be able to count sheep in a pen while they milled around; he had to be acquainted with the fine distinctions between a case of candled eggs, and a case of whites, and not mix them up with the run-of-mine seconds. Occasionally he assisted when a cow gave birth to her calf. Also he must be acquainted with the methods of persuading livestock to board a steamboat, which required no mean skill, as most cows are confirmed landlubbers. . . .

*The novelties of the Muskingum River still may be seen as these lines are written; the author recommends a voyage up that tributary to motorboat owners. There is no steamboat traffic at the present time. The length of the stream may be viewed from excellent automobile roads, but the proper way to enjoy the Muskingum, and rub elbows with its ancient locks and canals, is to make some arrangement to view the whole of it from a boat.

As a prime example of the unpredictable things which sometimes may happen while handling livestock to or from a steamboat, shortly after I came aboard the *General Pershing* she landed in at the Marietta wharfboat and, among other things, Mr. Henry Best, the wharfmaster, announced he had a bull tied back in the wharfboat's cattle pen for shipment to Wheeling. The mate (the same big, bashful, red-faced fellow who had been on the *Beach*), and Captain Guthrie, and both of the pilots (one of whom was Dan Patchell, the Indian-looking fellow) went back to the pen and looked at the bull and wagged their heads and smacked their lips and were unanimous in their appraisal of the beast; they said it was the best of the breed they ever saw, and went to the unheard of extreme of wasting fifteen minutes standing around discussing the relative merits of bullish pedigree points. Farmers by nature and steamboatmen by choice, the lot of them.

Finally the mate said he would reserve loading the bull until the last thing, and do all of his other freight transferring first. My, but he admired that bull! Instead of berating the roustabouts, he spent his time making ready for the big event of the evening, getting the bull aboard. He said it was necessary to do all of a bull's thinking for it—and he overlooked no bets.

A bull is different from a cow in more ways than you would imagine. You have heard the expression "bull-headed." It is apt. A bull never learns to do a thing in a given way: he always takes an original attitude toward any proposition which may confront him, and it is usually surprisingly wrong. For this reason the rate for transporting a cow from Marietta to Wheeling was \$2 per head on the *General Pershing*, while the bull rate was \$5. A bull doesn't take up much more room than a cow but it is well worth the extra price.

The miscellaneous freight work completed, I called out "On the road, here!" and marked a final pencilled circle on the sheaf of lading bills. Everything aboard but the bull.

The mate had rigged cattle fences (with which the *Pershing* was amply supplied) clear in on the steamboat to the quarters where the bull was to be confined for shipment. He went over these temporary barriers with care, and shook them, and leaned his weight on them, and rattled at them, to make sure he had them all tight and sound as a stockyard fence. He laid heavy, long, poplar planks from the edge of the wharfboat guard down the midship gangway deck, and slipped wooden blocks under them to hold up the weight—for a bull can get delusions and nightmares if a board so much as slightly gives under his feet. A bull wants solid going, and he won't stand for clumsy work.

All was in readiness now, and the spectators and loiterers cleared away to safe places and let the mate and his crew of roustabouts have entire charge of the floor. The mate took hold of the rope halter fastened in the large ring through the animal's nostrils. "All right," he said to the roustabouts, "open up." The colored boys sprang to their task and removed the pen door.

I wondered momentarily if the fairy tale writer who thought up the dragon wasn't thinking of the deep, sonorous roar of the bull's breathing when he concocted that piece of nonsense; this beast was quiet and at ease and nothing bothered him, yet at every breath he 'scaped like the *Robert E. Lee* with a roustabout on the safety valve.

The bull came out charging. There was only one way it could go, as the mate had seen to that: one-lane traffic right to destination. It pranced out, snorting and rolling big eyes.

"Steady, steady!" called the mate to nobody in particular—mostly to himself.

"Gather 'round 'im, men!" he ordered, and eight or ten roustabouts did various things. One grabbed the tail, to

steer, while others gathered to either flank in order to "lay a hand" on the job.

The critical point in bull-loading is the moment the big animal gets his first view of the steamboat he is about to embark on. He decides right then whether he is sailor enough to stand the voyage or whether he would rather go back to the farm he came from. This one planted his feet wide apart and let out a tremendous whoo—oosh! He was a landlubber.

Now is where a bull is worth the extra money asked for his transportation. You can get a cow humored to go aboard if she balks by leading out a calf, turning it around, and nine times out of ten she'll quietly follow wherever you take it. A horse will go aboard if you blindfold him; if that doesn't work turn him around and back him on: yes, funny thing about a horse, he'll back into anything stern foremost. Bulls haven't any reverse gear on them; they have but one clutch, and that is high gear forward. High gear or nothing.

THE mate tried various resources he had learned. He talked baby talk to the bull, gently coaxed it, sang it a lullaby, went tuk-tuk-tuk to it with his lips pursed up. Like a spoiled baby the bull stood still and pouted. The mate swore at it, gently and softly, without a trace of conviction. No results.

A "green" roustabout, noticing the failure of the bull to respond, picked up a flat plank nearby and, before anybody could stop him, he delivered an almighty whack, that cracked like a pistol, to the animal's rump.

As though this was the starting gun, the tremendous tonnage of beef made an Olympic dive toward the steamboat. The startled mate let go the halter rope and dived atop an oil barrel and out of reach. The bull came down on all four feet on the deck of the *General Pershing* with a jar that shook the smokestack: up again it went, and over the mate's fence. Now it was in the center of the deckroom aimed aft, but only for a fleeting second, for it took away with a roar for the engine room.

Our engineer was back there, of course, and saw what had happened. He tried to slam the door which led to his roomful of machinery but the terrified bull was through it in an instant and had the wreckage of the door-frame draped over its neck. It was an awful sight to watch that animal carry on; and terrifying, too. In trying to back away from the door wreckage the big brute's stern fell in the doctor pump, and there was a cracking and frying noise for a fraction of a second as a sizzling hot steam pipe bent back with the weight of those big hams pressed against it; then, like an arrow released from a taut bow, the animal leaped clear of this new torture and landed astraddle of a rudder stock. This enormous creature was wrecking the steamboat.

Our second mate, Mark Booth, was a young, healthy fellow who was a football star at college. Without waiting for signals he tackled. With a sickening crash the tiller let go and sagged to ruin. Mark jumped up on a cylinder. Free now, the bull saw an exit from this chamber of horrors and made for it, without counting on the fact that it led overboard into the river. He shattered about fifty dollars worth of bulkhead this time and there came an almighty splash. Undaunted, Mark Booth dived in after him, and grabbed a horn. The bull swam for the paddlewheel, towing Mark along as easily as a steamboat tows a fuel flat. With remarkable lack of judgment the animal tried to climb up the paddlewheel. Mark let go and swam ashore while six bucket planks splintered off as this lunging, struggling, snorting brute tried vainly to get a firm footing. It gave up and went ashore.

The river around the *General Pershing* was littered with jagged boards, splinters, and wreckage. You would think even a real mad bull would settle down now, but the feel of firm ground underneath put another dose of

pep in it all over again. Our big fat steward was ambling down the levee with two packages of baker's bread. The bull started for him, but never got to him, as a wire rope tripped it, brought it to the ground. The bull did not attempt to get up again and an investigation showed the poor animal had broken one of its forelegs. The owner was located and he took charge of the beast.

The *General Pershing* had to pay the owner fifty dollars for the damage inflicted on the bull. Our carpenter scribbled orders for lumber for the next three weeks; we never made a landing day or night, it seemed, but what he wasn't up to see about hardware or boards or something. The repair bills totaled \$87.16. It was a dismal business all around.

My partner clerk on the *General Pershing* was a wiry little fellow who made a show at being precise and accurate. He was quick as a cat, and nothing ever escaped him. It was his boast that he could throw down the discharging book and unload every item of freight from memory, a thing which he never accomplished, but had the audacity to try one time when loaded with a good cargo of liquor. He would stand for no foolishness. My triumphs with threshing machines and root beer barrels had come to his attention and he gave me a lecture on the subject.

"Don't trust anybody!" he told me time and again. "Don't take anybody's word for anything. Never guess. Don't take a single, solitary thing for granted, no matter how trivial, and then you'll do like you ought to do, and never make a mistake." I tried to remember all of these things, and wrote them down, and memorized them, and said them in my prayers, and asked Divine help in the matter, repeating the instructions over again to be dead certain.

Even with this preparation, I was soon involved in another blunder which afterwards was related along the rivers as sort of a "stock story." What happened was not my fault entirely.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MOUNDVILLE is a sleepy looking West Virginia town when viewed from the Ohio River in summertime. Shade trees of considerable girth hide many of the buildings and rooftops and a casual visitor would not suspect that some nine thousand inhabitants live in the small bottomland settlement, nor would a person suspect that a great Indian mound rears itself, volcano-like, in the midst of the town, topped by a cluster of trees. Least of all does the peaceful landscape indicate the grim stone walls of the West Virginia penitentiary, which is situated there, and for which Moundville is locally noted.

For many years; and while the *General Pershing* was running, a small wharfboat was moored at the foot of the brick-graded wharf and it blended with the general description, seeming sound asleep and tranquil, yet all of the steamboat crews who had occasion to do business at this landing place soon discovered that the owner of the frail wooden wharfboat, Henry Ernst by name, was fiery-tempered and apt to do unpredictable things. One night, for example, a packet landed there and found the doors securely locked and Mr. Ernst sound asleep. The captain pounded the doors with his fists to attract attention and there came no sound; he pounded again, and again, and asked the deck crew to keep silent while he pressed his ear to the wooden door to determine whether Mr. Ernst was stirring around inside. There came a tremendous blast from a shotgun from within, the captain was deluged with splinters and shot holes pocked the upper portions of the door. Mr. Ernst, with pants hastily pulled over his underwear and suspenders trailing to his

feet, shoved the big door open on its squeaking rollers with one hand and held the smoking firearm in the other. "Anybody get killed?" he demanded in a husky voice.

The captain still was making survey of his personal anatomy and taking stock of the roustabout crew, and was slow to answer.

"Don't never pound on this door," stated Mr. Ernst flatly, "when I sleep I get nightmares and when I wake up with somebody trying to bust my doors down it don't help none. Blow the whistle when you want to wake me up; you've got a whistle up there. Hear me? Blow the whistle next time."

"Nobody got hurt," stammered the captain.

"You're lucky, all of you," said Mr. Ernst, "for I aimed to blow your whole outfit to kingdom come. Who's the pilot on that boat? Doesn't he know enough to blow a whistle?"

This was Mr. Ernst's way of conducting business and steamboat crews usually deferred to his whims and notions. Mr. Ernst was seldom bothered by prowlers and the freights in his wharfboat were as safe as though they were locked in the United States Mint; he had the good will and patronage of all of the local merchants and, considering the size of the city, steamboats did an unusually heavy trade there.

The inmates of the local penitentiary manufactured brooms and overalls and large consignments of these goods were shipped to such river points as Marietta, Parkersburg, Charleston and Huntington. It was no uncommon occurrence for a packet to load thirty-five or forty dollars worth of freight at Moundville; a good "find" for any steamboat. One drizzly July afternoon the *General Pershing* landed at Mr. Ernst's wharfboat and, among other things, found fourteen cases of overalls consigned to Charleston. I was on watch, and counted the wooden boxes of assorted sizes, and fetched up with fourteen: no complex astronomical calculation about counting such a small number of obviously large packing crates. The roustabouts carried them aboard. We finished up our business and went on down the river, and as we backed away from the wharfboat Mr. Ernst and I carried on a last-minute conversation which stretched out until we were a full quarter-mile away, and had to do with reassurances that I would send him a telegram in due time and advise him when to expect us back up the river: we habitually sent such a wire, for the double purpose of getting freight and making certain Mr. Ernst would be wide awake when we arrived there.

Late that afternoon we landed at New Martinsville, West Virginia, and a stout man dressed in black clothes, wearing a broad-brimmed hat, stepped aboard immediately when the planks were laid, and inquired for the clerk.

"Yes, sir!" I said.

"You got some cases of dry goods at Moundville," commented the gentleman with a voice of authority.

"Yes, sir. Fourteen of them."

"Thirteen of them," he corrected, looking at me out of one eye and cocking his head over a trifle.

My partner would have flown at his throat like a bulldog for such a stinging insult to his counting ability, but I was jumpy, and swallowed the statement for literal truth, and stammered, "How did I ever come to do that?"

The good-natured mate stepped into the breach at this point and said, "Mister, if you have some good reason for wanting to know about those cases, I'll show you each and every one of them, and I'm pretty sure you will discover there are fourteen of them. for I counted them myself."

"You got thirteen boxes of dry goods on there," repeated the big man. "I'm the sheriff of Wetzel County—"

"Yes, sir!" said the mate politely, and the roustabouts became silent in order to drink in the details: the sudden

intrusion of a sheriff sometimes boded ill for those dark rascals who frequently used assumed names to erase ill-advised escapades.

"There is a convict missing from the penitentiary at Moundsville and we have reason to think he nailed himself up in one of these boxes and shipped himself down the river," said the sheriff. "He worked in the crating department, and this is the only shipment which left there today."

With borrowed hatchet and pinch-bar, the mate and the sheriff pried open twelve of the boxes to discover they were filled with overalls. This took considerable time and a great deal of work inasmuch as the cases had been stowed away on the forward barricades and covered with tarpaulins to keep them dry in the drizzle which had been coming down. There was the question, also, of the right for a steamboat crew to hack open boxes which had been sealed for shipment. "There is no harm in these boxes, that's a certain," concluded the mate.

"Where are the other two?" inquired the sheriff.

It seems the barricades would hold only twelve of the boxes and the balance of the shipment had been stowed back in the deckroom, aft of the boilers. "The last two are small cases," explained the mate, "and I don't think a man could squeeze in them."

The sheriff was stubborn in his resolve to inspect everything so the procession went aft, and in short order the end of one of the smaller boxes was pried off disclosing nothing but overalls. A good example of the fruits of thoroughness here: One strong blow from the mate's hatchet brought the end of the last box off with one wallop. The sheriff peered in. "Come out of there," he said.

A small, bald-pated fellow very meekly complied, and emerged from his wooden chrysalis with a can of baked beans in one hand and a box of cigars in the other. He had a bleeding cut over his left eye. "Guess the smokes are on me, gents," he said. "One cigar for everybody except whoever dumped me off his shoulder on this deck when the box was carried in—phew, that was a crash!"

The roustabout who had toted this box aft very dexterously eased out of reach.

"Looks funny to me that you would pile twelve boxes out on the head of the steamboat where it is cold and windy," observed the sheriff to our mate, "and take this special one back of the boilers where it is warm and dry."

The mate looked guilty as all get out; of course he had nothing to do with it; simply a coincidence. The convict placidly allowed the bracelets to be clamped on his wrists and seemed to enjoy explaining the peculiar construction of this case, which he had manufactured with one end secured from the inside and latched in such a way that he could release it at will. His original intention, he explained, was to escape at the Moundsville wharfboat but Mr. Ernst, in his usual busy and thorough way, had thrown a heavy tarpaulin over the box to keep off the rain which leaked through the wharfboat roof; this heavy canvas cover was secured so tightly that the convict could not manage to remove the end of his box.

This enterprising little convict tagged up the shore in tow of the sheriff and we felt sort of sorry for the miscalculation in his plans; he was in for fighting in a busload of passengers, and had three months to serve on a two-year stretch: we never heard what extra sentence was added for his mid-summer excursion aboard the *General Pershing*.

For a month or more after this incident, it was no uncommon thing for somebody to step up, slap me on the back, and say, "Well! I hear you are checking on convicts for overalls these days!"

The head clerk on the *General Pershing* told me one morning that he had concluded to make a steamboat clerk

out of me and, without bothering to discover my reactions to his plans, immediately laid down a set of new rules. He said I was to stay away from the pilothouse. This did not have anything to do with the outcome of the Moundsville convict affair; rather, I think now, he was trying to be nice to me. This clerk's idea of success was to be known as a "lightning" clerk of a large packet steamboat; all other notions of attainment paled in his vision compared to this one. He was an ascetic on the subject of rates and freights. He considered that meddling in the pilothouse, which was a department utterly foreign to clerical affairs, was a serious impediment to my progress. He would have none of it in the future. He disliked pilots anyhow.

"Consider a pilot who has attained success," he said to me, "he draws down the biggest salary on the steamboat and spends all of his wakened hours standing in a glass cage, like a monkey, from which he has no escape, pawing a wheel around one way and the other way; he is limited by law to certain portions of a river, and he is bound to stay within those limits and practice his profession. He does the same things year in and year out, and soon becomes stupid and dull. He cannot carry on a normal conversation; he loses interest in all of the world outside of the two willow shores he watches day and night; he sends his money home for a wife to spend on foolish things; his children grow up and never come to know their own father; his stomach disintegrates from the continual combination of worry and grease; his health fails and the day comes when he is useless. At this time he is sent ashore, where he is an utter stranger, and is allowed to die a lonely and heartbroken old man, and somebody has to take up a collection to bury him in a potter's field with no tombstone."

"On the other hand," my informant continued, "a clerk is in direct contact with the world and its people and it is his job to get along with populations of humanity. He becomes versed in the ways of people, and of banks (money banks) and of business. Clerks wear diamond stickpins as they become older, they acquire property and fame, sometimes become boat owners—they always succeed, at any rate. Historians, writers, poets, and newspaper reporters always mention the captain and the head clerk of a boat by name; the pilots and engineers, never—unless they have created a catastrophe and are responsible for it. Steamboat clerks have become bank presidents, heads of great manufacturing concerns, congressmen, mayors, and persons of substance."

I deemed it prudent to keep away from the pilothouse while working under a man who harbored these notions. All of that summer I kept my attentions directed to cows, chickens, pigs and the like. Early in the fall an event transpired which changed the picture somewhat, although I never did forget the vivid, terrible outcome of pilots which this clerk had drawn for me.

"From Some Higher Place"

Next month we will publish this stirring novel based on the exploits of the American volunteer pilots in China. These men and their acts are a part of the history of the Second World War. The significant spirit of these characters—the questing souls that could never weep because there was so much work, never relent because the face of disaster was always before them—has been most ably presented—

by Richard G. Hubler

ROOM 40, O. B.

A book length novel of the Black Chamber and the Secret Service.

by DENISON CLIFT

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROOM

THE ROOM was at the end of a long, gloomy, low-vaulted corridor, second floor back, with an entrance that was utterly nondescript and obscure; and the number—40—was set in brass high on the oak panel. They had plunked the staff down here in a wing of the Old Building because it was unproved and experimental and didn't matter very much, as they thought at the time; and there was no other available spot for it in the Admiralty otherwise.

To hide its secret identity, it became known as Room 40 O.B., and there it ended, for all the outer world at war knew. Its amazing adventures were shrouded in silence. Not a line ever appeared in the newspapers. Even cabinet ministers knew little or nothing of its work. And enemy spies assailed it in vain. Its name, "40 O.B.," was shrewdly adopted to kill all curiosity about it.

Despite the fact that it was surrounded by mystery, no one seriously attempted to fathom its secret. A few men came and went, mostly middle-aged men with keen intellectual faces; but no woman was ever seen to enter the Room. Sometimes when the door would open, a strange whirring sound came from within, followed by a light thud—which might have been a carrier whirling up from the telegraphs below and dropping into a basket. And the lights in the Room burned continuously, while Big Ben boomed off the hours from midnight till dawn.

But for one odd fact, the scores of Admiralty drones would have gone through the whole four years of war unconscious of Room 40's existence.

London charwomen are curiously self-important and garrulous creatures. And Room 40 was the one room in the O.B. where the chars were barred. They swept and washed and tidied the other offices, but were denied entrance to that single room at the end of the corridor.

In the mornings, very early, a man in a morning coat, who was stiffly dignified and looked like a professor, would sweep, and empty the wastebaskets, and every shred of paper was always meticulously burned. It was revolutionary in the world of the chars.

Mad Maggie, who had been fifteen years scrubbing the floors of the O.B., wagged her head dolefully. "Coo, and wot's goin' on behind the door?" she grumbled. "With the toffs doin' our work, what's to become of us?"

She got an answer, but little solace, from Whitehall Kate. "Let them keep their bloody secrets!" said Kate. "Come, Maggie, we need a drop o' the dew o' Glengarry."

It was said after the war that Room 40 had won the war. . . .

The news of Germany's defeat, and doom, rested heavily upon the code experts in the Wilhelmstrasse. The war was lost. That tragedy, with all its terrible implications, cut deep into the German soul.

The Code Room was a big, severe, gray room; and there was a storm outside, and the rain slashed disconsolately against the windows. A dreary, dispiriting day for such depressing news.

Outside, in the street, a few men and women passed by, cold, hungry, and broken in spirit. Everywhere—in the streets, cafés, in the buildings of the Wilhelmstrasse, in the houses—the people were in spiritual agony after their four years of sacrifice and hunger. And in the Code Room a dozen men were emptying desks, burning documents, storing other papers away in boxes. Their work was over.

Captain Koebig, a tall, slim, blond officer, felt that British propaganda was the vital cause of his country's downfall.

"It helped to bring the United States into the war," he declared; "from the day of America's entry, it was the finish for Germany."

Lieutenant Baumer's mind was confused and miserable. He wondered mostly what their chief was thinking. "How will Colonel Eberling take defeat," he asked, "after his four years of racking work?"

The door opened, and Colonel Eberling came in.

He was a heavy-set man, grim-faced and dour, with an ugly scar across his face. He glanced quickly around the room at his men packing, burning and destroying documents, preparing to leave.

ASULLEN silence came over the men. They listened like statues as Colonel Eberling spoke. This was a tragic day for Germany, he said. But his men had worked faithfully, loyally; and he thanked them. It was not because they had failed that Germany had been defeated. No, they had done their work well. Now—and only now—could he reveal something that they did not know.

"In July," he said, "the Wilhelmstrasse learned of the existence of a carefully-guarded British secret: their Cipher Bureau."

The code experts and cryptographers listened breathlessly, nerves taut. Had their work, then, been discovered and destroyed by the British?

Colonel Eberling's words confirmed their sudden apprehensions.



*"Kobeler," said Usher, "you'd never met Miss Ainger before tonight; why involve her?"
Kobeler laughed. "Is that her story?" he asked.*

"Germany's vital wireless messages, coded and dispatched from this room, have been intercepted by the British stations and successfully deciphered by a department known secretly as 'Room 40 O.B.' As often as we changed our codes, the British cryptographers were able to break them down. Our dispatches at the Battle of Jutland, which we thought we had cleverly contrived by having Van Scheer exchange his flagship's wireless call-sign with that of the naval wireless station at No. 3 entrance to the River Jade, so that his signals signed 'Friedrich der Grosse' would be located in the harbor and not betray the High Sea Fleet in the North Sea, were all picked up and deciphered by the English.

"Our Nauen broadcasts to our U-boats to sink without trace were read, and the U-boats ambushed and depth-bombed. Our Zepp raids over England were known in advance, and the Zepps brought down in flames. All the Verdun codes were deciphered and read.

"When Sir Roger Casement left Germany in a submarine to stir up the Irish rebellion, the moment the submarine sailed, Room 40 O.B. had the intercept. And Sir Roger finished on the scaffold at Pentonville."

Colonel Eberling struggled to speak calmly; but his voice roughened, a film of perspiration glistened on his forehead, and the veins of his neck stood out like whipcords.

His eyes moved from face to face, pale, grim, set faces graven with growing hatred.

"That state document from Zimmerman to President Carranza of Mexico, urging Mexico to make war on the United States and promising Mexico Texas, Arizona and New Mexico—the message that brought America into the war—intercepted and deciphered by Room 40! So —P O Z sent out our code messages—and Room 40 broke them down!"

Captain Koebig's rasping voice interrupted. "But why didn't we know this in the first year?" he asked.

Colonel Eberling answered with controlled bitterness:

"The British have their points," he said. "And their shrewdness in keeping Room 40 a secret was one. We know now that their east coast was dotted with listening posts. Lowestoft, York, Murcar, Lerwick, these were only a few. The intercepting stations picked up our P O Z messages. They were instantly relayed to the Admiralty—to Room 40. And there Ewing's staff deciphered them and anticipated our moves."

Lieutenant Baumer exclaimed with a snarl: "Outwitted! And by the English."

A murmur of protest, cruel and bitter, passed like a wave through the men.

It was the emotion that strangles a prisoner who had long planned escape from prison and had been trapped at the supreme moment.

After a stark moment Colonel Eberling faced the cryptographers, with clenched fists and resolve upsurging in his harassed soul.

"Germany will one day strike again!" he said. "All that she has fought for is not lost. And when that day comes, the mistakes of this war must not happen again. It may be a quarter of a century, but we will strike! And in that hour one of the things to be done is to have one of our agents planted in the British code-room—a secret agent who will be above suspicion, who will have rare intelligence, high courage, ruthlessness, and who will thwart the British cleverness."

He paused. He watched the men, most of whom were younger than he. A flash of hope lightened their faces.

"But this will be a difficult thing to do. Yes, damned difficult! And, at the last moment, impossible. Because the enemy cryptographers are all men of tested loyalty, of unimpeachable background, of a certain rare experience. They are men with 'cipher brains.' Intricate, scientific, mathematical. Such men are rare."

Colonel Eberling paused again. He studied the group of faces searchingly.

"Now, today," he said, "when one war is ending, the seed must be planted. Our agent must be picked, trained, and integrated into English life, and as the years pass, and the hour comes again, Germany will be ready.

"I may not live to see the next war," the Colonel said grimly, "but from today on, I will live to train and prepare that man. The British will know my hatred, and my work will live. We will thwart them! We will beat them!"

As the Colonel's ringing words charged through the room, the crushed, beaten men responded with a rough cheer, and with cries of "*Hoch! Hoch!*"

"With England beaten, the world will come under our control!" declared Colonel Eberling. "France, Russia, the United States—they will go down before our onslaughts! I may be too old, or in my grave; but I will fight again for the Fatherland—I will fight in the soul of another unconquerable German!" Passionately he struck the desk with his hand. "*Gott strafe England!*"

The younger men, in unison, took up the cry:

"*Gott strafe England!*"

CHAPTER TWO

THE KING SPEAKS

JUST as Colonel Eberling had predicted, a quarter of a century later Germany struck again, moving into Poland at dawn. Again Europe was in flames. And Room 40 O.B.—the designation had remained—in the British Admiralty went into action. Room 40 was a spacious room, with a crowded series of desks and filing cabinets. Adjoining was the Secret-Ink Laboratory and the Photostat Room. There was a huge blackboard, and smaller blackboards, on which the codes were often worked out; it was covered with letters and numbers. On the back wall were hung enormous charts showing the waters surrounding England: the Atlantic, the Channel and the North Sea. Tiny black flags marked a hundred spots on the charts. And as part of the suite was the private office of Sir Christopher Pelt, the head of Room 40.

It was September third, the first day.

Sir Christopher had advised his men to stand by; and when the first news-flashes told of the German movement, the men had come quickly, for already the air was filled with German coded messages.

Swiftly, concentratedly, the cryptographers were at the blackboard, actively at work trying to decipher a German "intercept"—a coded message, evidently of marked importance, picked up by one of the listening posts along the east coast and sent over from the Admiralty by old Morgan, the trusted messenger.

John Usher was the genius of the Room. His father had rendered distinguished service in Room 40 during World War I; it was his keen cipher brain, in fact, that had solved the Zimmerman-to-Carranza message after thirteen terrible days of anxiety and frustration; and John had felt the same fascination for the game,—for a game it was,—and had taken naturally to the work. His mind thought in terms of hieroglyphics and intricate mathematical combinations. He was now thirty-three, of quiet, magnetic personality, smooth-shaven, and handsomely bronzed from a summer of fishing in France. He dressed comfortably, in baggy gray trousers and a blue tweed coat, and he smoked an old briar. On the surface he refused to take the world seriously, and cloaked his emotions with congenial good humor. He was liked by everyone, and his infectious laugh added to his pop-

ularity. A man who can laugh, at the gay things and the sad, is always wanted around. Since the untimely death of his young wife, there was one passion in his life: his little son David, now in school in Switzerland.

Usher knew the other men intimately. Sir Christopher, who knew that the day might come when he would have to assemble these men quickly, kept in close touch with them and kept them in touch with each other. Every six or seven months he gave a dinner in London, sometimes at the Café Royal, sometimes at the Savoy grill; and Bevan would come down from Dundee, and Cope from Oxford, and Usher back from the Continent. It was always a merry evening, and over the port or champagne they discussed the cricket at Lord's, or the regatta, or the show at Cowes—but never the work of Room 40, lest a listening waiter might hear. You would have thought it an old school-tie gathering, and nothing more.

Cope was the eldest of the group, an old Oxonian, almost sixty. He was fairly bad-tempered, and liked his tea served precisely on the dot; but Usher admired his mathematical genius and always read his brochures from the Cambridge Press.

Bevan, on the other hand, the one from Dundee where he was a headmaster, was a fine good-hearted man who always took the tolerant view in any argument. He was cursed by a complete and sympathetic understanding of the other fellow; but he was brave and heavy-set, and he loved to hum the old Harry Lauder songs.

Mason was able, but he was not so popular, for he was blatantly vain about his ability. Whereas Waterlow, who was one of the cleverest, was self-consciously modest. He was probably the best all-round scholar of the lot. He came from the British Museum, where for years he had been the leading expert in deciphering the hieroglyphics of Babylonian and Syrian tablets. He was a noted linguist, and was something of an autocrat, and rather a snob. And he tied everything up in red tape.

And finally Colonel Hedley. Hedley was a D.S.O. from the last war. A rather fat, good-humored fellow, with a round, fresh face like Mr. Pickwick, with big glasses stuck on the end of his nose. He took life easily, was always ready with a chaffing remark, and was the leg-puller of the Room. He carried a bullet in his hip from St. Quentin, limped, and walked with a cane.

It was difficult to imagine that one of these men, coming from a high position in English life, with credentials checked and scrupulously verified, had been created for almost a quarter of a century for this moment, schooled in the machinelike cruelty and brutal craft of Hitlerian hate. If the long arm of Colonel Eberling's resolve had succeeded, it was indeed one of diabolic and superhuman cleverness. How a man for years could sit around a table at the Café Royal or the Savoy grill and mix congenially with his colleagues, and chat and drink and reveal himself as an Englishman, and discuss the remodeling of his cottage in Kent, or a five-hundred-year-old stone cottage in the Cotswolds, or his success in growing tomatoes in a hothouse, all the myriad things that would stamp him as safe and loyal and British to the core, and yet be responsible for the crimes and the amazing events that lay just ahead, would seem to pass human acceptance. Indeed, success, by the one who planned it, would be predicated upon one singular fact: that there were in all Britain only half a dozen men with super-cipher-brains. There were others, of course; but if a blow could be struck in the beginning, and these half-dozen brains eliminated, Room 40 would meet its master in the new codes of the Berlin bureau. Was this, indeed, likely to happen? Had the Nazi antennae reached here into the very nerve-center of Whitehall at war?

"Well, what do you make of it?" Usher asked Mason.

In the quietly tense atmosphere, the cryptographers surveyed the series of letters that Bevan chalked up on

the blackboard. It was obviously a Nazi naval code transmitted by the radio station Deutschland Sender. Sixty intercepts were waiting to be decoded. But first the cipher must be found.

Cope called out the letters as Bevan chalked them up. On the blackboard they looked like this:

3—9—39		
eadsofartk	kwbaplhdxo	hdmsrcowd
lfnemtodkl	lsntyapxib	vhsogcslrm
cksuwaolmw	tpvyelrpp	pelidkhapy
hejslapamq	gtquinnokh	odlepenato
ndlakwoqqe	cuwksuhale	utsilcJosh
gtmsisnpit	jctrsunor	cltsidpaha

"Looks like code to me," Mason answered Usher in his usual tone of authority.

"No, I don't think so," Usher argued. "I think it's cipher. Look at those long sequences of consonants. Yes, I'd say it's cipher. And probably a transposition cipher."

Turning to Waterlow, Usher directed:

"Waterlow, the first thing is to work out the frequency table. You're particularly good at that."

Waterlow smiled wanly at the compliment. He went to another blackboard and began chalking up the frequency table. He checked the number of A's, B's, C's, and so on down the alphabet. The frequency with which letters appear in a message usually leads to the first clue.

Usher left the blackboard and went toward the telephone in the seclusion of an alcove. His manner was anxious as he put through a Continental personal call for David Usher at the St. Francis School in Berne.

Morgan, the messenger who carried the more important intercepts and the decoded messages between 40 O.B. and the Admiralty, was smoking a pipe and chuckling over the latest *Punch*. He was a kindly old soul, with graying hair and a walrus mustache like the famous *Old Bill*.

Overhearing Usher put the call through, he asked: "How's your lad David?"

"Very well, thank you, Morgan," Usher answered him. "I'm going to have Steiner, the head, send him home at once. If the Nazis should make a drive through Switzerland, he might have trouble getting out. This little island is the best place for Englishmen these days."

"Quite right!" agreed Morgan, removing his pipe and nodding his head emphatically. Then with a kindly, human light in his eyes: "David must be a likely lad now."

"He's ten," said Usher. "He's coming along nicely."

"I remember the day you brought him into the Room to have a look round," said Morgan, his old eyes a-twinkle. "Poked his saucy little nose into everything—the Secret-Ink Laboratory, the Photostat Room—and asked a hundred questions. Oh, that lad's going to be a cryptographer one day!"

"I hope not," laughed Usher, touched by the old man's humanness. "Too much fag." And while awaiting his call, Usher returned to the blackboard.

At this moment the door to the private office opened, and Sir Christopher Pelt stepped into the Room. Sir Christopher was a rugged, round-shouldered bulldog of a man. He had distinguished himself in the diplomatic service; he was a scientist and a well-known mathematician.

"The King," he said.

A hush came over the Room. Every man stood silent, facing a radio over which came the King's speech.

"... It is to this high purpose that I now call my people at home and my people across the seas who will make our cause their own. I ask them to stand calm and firm and united in this time of trial. The task will be hard. There

may be dark days ahead and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield, but we can only do the right as we see the right, and reverently commit our cause to God. If one and all we keep resolutely faithful to it, ready for whatever service or sacrifice it may demand, then with God's help we shall prevail. May He bless and keep us all."

Every man was moved by the simple power of that speech. Every man felt the majesty and responsibility of being an Englishman in that critical hour. Like true Englishmen, they did not comment much; there was a job to be done, and Room 40 must face its stupendous task.

The men returned to the blackboard and carried on. They discussed the submarine situation as indicated by the black flags on the map. The Nazis had already distributed their U-boats in the Atlantic and the North Sea. Secret coded messages from Deutschland Sender filled the air. These must be read; but first the cipher must be found.

Waterlow finished the frequency table. There it was chalked up:

A	THH THH THH THH II
B	THH THH
C	THH THH III
D	THH THH THH I
E	THH THH THH THH THH THH THH II
F	THH I

Each letter was checked straight down the alphabet. Usher's expert eye studied the table.

"The frequency appears to be a normal language frequency," he said. "The letters A, E, I, N, R, S, T occur most often, which is to be expected in German. Without applying the language tests, let's assume that it is in German and see what that gets us.

"Also, let's assume that it's a transposition. I think we'll find that's right. The Nazi cryptographers have first written the message in German, and then, by one of their mathematical formulas, disarranged the letters." He paused and chuckled. "The Germans call us stupid," he said, "but they never seem to realize that their C's are almost always followed by H or K. So that, by their arrangement, all the digraphs CH's and CK's are broken apart. Now we've got to find the mathematical formula for matching up all the C's with their proper H or K."

Usher now set about preparing a new chart of the letters. Each letter was given a number. And when they were chalked up, they appeared like this:

e	a	d	s	o	f	j	r	t	k	Etc.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

By applying the frequency table, Usher designated with exactitude the number of C's and H's. These he now chalked up with their letter-numbers:

C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	Etc.
65	73	105	109	147	182	191	197		
H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	Etc.
12	24	39	50	61	88	107	113		

Now, proceeding rapidly, Usher subtracted the letter-numbers of all the C's from the letter-numbers of all the H's, to find a common denominator. Where the H number was smaller than the C number, he added 292, the number of letters in the message, to the H number before subtracting.

Then, having discovered the common factor, the mathematical distance apart of the C's and H's, he pieced together the various digraphs CH throughout the message. This began to indicate fragments of words.

One CH was followed by ANGE. The word CHANGE appeared. Another word—COURSE—was quickly indicated. There followed fifteen minutes of tenseness and eagerness among the men as Usher, word by word, broke the cipher. He had been right. It was cipher, and not code. He worked quietly, his face set, not in anxiety,—for he knew that he would succeed,—but in highly pleasurable concentration. Breaking a cipher was more fun for Usher than following a fox to the kill, or landing a ten-inch trout in the Windrush of the Cotswolds. As he worked, he was keenly conscious of an antagonist, a distant enemy, who prided himself upon his superhuman skill in devising a code or cipher that could not be cracked. But the pride of 40 O.B. was that there was no code devised by a human brain that another human brain could not decipher.

Usher swiftly took the German message from the hieroglyphics of the blackboard and handed the slip of yellow paper to Sir Christopher. The head read the words and was startled by its meaning.

TO COMMANDERS OF U-BOATS 26, 18,
31.
CHANGE COURSE PROCEED SOUTHWEST
TO SCAPA FLOW. AVOID MINE FIELDS
MAP THIRTY COURSE SEVEN. CONCENTRATE
ATTACK BATTLE CRUISERS.

Sir Christopher, Cope, Bevan, and every other man in the Room, realized the lurking danger in the message. If they had failed! But Room 40 had never failed. It was a tradition. No time must be lost. Minutes—an hour—without this warning, and capital ships of the Grand Fleet might be lost. Sir Christopher immediately dispatched the message by Morgan, who took it in his dispatch-case across to the Admiralty.

"Congratulations, Usher," said Sir Christopher; "we're off to a good start."

The others offered their congratulations.

"Oh, don't give me the credit," protested Usher; "what we do here is done by us all. The work, the responsibility and the credit belongs to us all." He was actually embarrassed, and turned away with actual shyness.

THERE was a break; tea was brought in; and for ten minutes, before they settled down in earnest to decipher the bunch of intercepts, they smoked and drank their tea.

Cope groused, as usual. The tea was not hot enough; the flavor was bad. Was this the kind of muck, he asked, that they must drink for the duration?

Colonel Hedley laughed, and offered to pour a shot of rum into it.

"God have mercy!" exclaimed Cope, and drank the acid stuff with a wry face. It was really very good office tea.

Suddenly the door opened, and Morgan hurried in. "They've sunk the *Athenia*!" he exclaimed. "Off the Hebrides, with fourteen hundred on board."

Waterlow quickly turned on the radio.

In terse, dramatic sentences the B.B.C. announcer was relating the known facts.

The *Athenia* had sailed from Glasgow with Canadians and some Americans. When two hundred miles off the Hebrides, a terrific explosion rent her amidships. British destroyers were taking the rescued to Greenock and Galway. Three hundred were missing. That was all that was known at the moment.

Tense, indignant emotions gripped the men. Bitterness, and an instinctive loathing for the enemy. This had

happened on the first day. What other outrages against innocent humanity might not yet occur?

It was Waterlow, the weedy little scholar from the British Museum, who expressed the inner fury of the men. He stood in the center of the Room, jaws set, lips tightly compressed, with his eyes afire.

"It was one of the King's ships," he said. "If a German torpedo did it, we'll make them pay for it! We'll break their hearts in the end!"

In silence Sir Christopher distributed the pile of intercepts among the men. Now that they had the cipher, they could read them—could perhaps, by their work, anticipate and prevent another such fearful crime.

CHAPTER THREE

MISS AINGER



It was late in the afternoon when the door opened and Chambers, an inspector from Scotland Yard, accompanied by a fingerprint expert, entered the Room. It was part of the routine that the fingerprints of all the men, from Sir Christopher, the head, down to Morgan, the messenger, must be recorded. "Like a pack of highwaymen," snarled Cope, amidst laughter from the others.

"All right, Dick Turpin, we'll take you first," grinned Inspector Chambers.

The fingerprint expert spread his inkpad on Cope's desk, pressed Cope's horny fingers into the ink, and recorded his prints.

"What a filthy business!" groaned Bevan, the Scotchman, next in turn. "Makes me feel like Smith, who drowned his brides in the bath!"

After Bevan, the expert pressed John Usher's fingers into the pad. He paused as he saw that the left little finger was missing a joint.

"Well, we'll have to miss that one," he said. "Accident, Mr. Usher?"

"Oh! Yes, a hunting trip," replied Usher. "Shooting grouse a few years ago in Scotland. With that old woman Bevan, matter of fact," he grinned.

Inspector Chambers laughed. "What kind of luck can you expect, shooting with a miserable Scot?"

"I should have known," chuckled Usher. "I'm lucky to have my head."

When Chambers and the expert had finished the fingerprinting, they departed with their records in a dispatch-case.

There was something weighing on Sir Christopher's mind.

About five o'clock he came out of his private office and stood a moment in silence as he surveyed the staff, seated at their desks, concentratedly busy deciphering the Nazi messages. There was something he wanted to do, which was a departure for the Room, and would concern the staff of men. Liberal-minded, he liked to have his men with him; it made for *esprit de corps*. And this was a step he had determined upon, and hoped for approbation and agreement.

He interrupted the men. He recalled to them the name of Miss Sudan Ainger. Miss Ainger, he said, had been the assistant and confidential secretary of Lord Attleboro. During his archeological days she had succeeded brilliantly in transcribing many Egyptian inscriptions. Then Lord Attleboro had become an active figure in the Admiralty.

"The point is," said Sir Christopher, "that before Lord Attleboro died he impressed upon me that Miss Ainger had a remarkable 'cipher brain,' and if another war broke out, he urged that we use her in the Cryptographic Bureau."

Sir Christopher studied the faces of the men for reactions. Cope and Bevan and Waterlow expressed irritation; Waterlow, indeed, outright disgust. Colonel Hedley received the idea with complacency. John Usher's eyes lighted up. His surprise was followed quickly by eager interest. He and Miss Ainger were in love.

"I need hardly tell you how tragically short we are of personnel," continued Sir Christopher. "And cipher brains are almost impossible to find. Here is a young woman whose brain and training will be invaluable to us. I know of Miss Ainger's work, and I want to bring her into the Room." He paused, and glanced from face to face. "I'd like to know how you men feel about having a woman here."

There was a momentary silence. There had never been a woman in the Room before, and this was revolutionary. Each man, in his mind, tried to picture a woman among them. It would alter the whole atmosphere; it would certainly set up problems.

Cope was the first to speak.

"No," he thundered, "I don't like women!"

Colonel Hedley guffawed. "What's the matter, Cope, afraid she'll hook you?"

"I just don't like women in a man's office," growled Cope. "Besides, I don't agree they're good at this work."

"Well, we'll let her make the tea," chaffed Colonel Hedley. "Women are good at that, anyway."

Bevan said: "If she comes, we won't be able to sweat so jucily."

"What do you think, Waterlow?" asked Sir Christopher.

Waterlow, the little bald-headed, sad-eyed expert from the British Museum, pondered.

"Whose idea is this, yours or Miss Ainger's?" he asked.

"Well, actually it is Miss Ainger's idea," replied Sir Christopher. "She has asked to be transferred to this department."

"Frankly, I'm against it," protested Waterlow sharply in his precise, snobbish manner. "The work tears your nerves to pieces. A woman will crack up and let us down."

John Usher broke in.

"Wait a minute, Waterlow," he said. "I've known Miss Ainger for years. She's a very cool, determined young woman. She has plenty of nerve. You needn't worry about Miss Ainger. She's not only got nerve and brain—she's got charm."

"I don't mean to be personal," answered Waterlow, "but aren't you engaged to her?"

"I am," said Usher. "We are going to be married."

Waterlow smiled a cold, meaningful smile. "Of course," he said, "you'd like her in the Room."

"I'm sorry you raised the point," Usher said. "My recommendation of Miss Ainger for this work is purely professional; it could not be otherwise."

Sir Christopher interrupted.

"I'm going to call her in, and you can meet her," he said to the men. "None of you know her except John and myself. Perhaps meeting her will make a difference."

He returned to his private office, telephoned to Room 22 and asked Miss Ainger to come over to Room 40.

A few minutes later Miss Ainger entered, and Sir Christopher introduced her with the significant remark: "Miss Ainger, I want you to meet your new colleagues."

Miss Ainger gave a pleasurable start. Sir Christopher's words told her that she had realized an ambition.

John Usher came forward and congratulated her. Before all the Room, he took her slim hand in his and said: "I'm glad you're going to be with us. I'm sure you'll be an immense help, and we need you."

Colonel Hedley added his felicitations. With a sly smile he whispered: "We needed someone like you to brew a good pot of tea."

Miss Ainger laughed, a light gay little laugh. "I'll do my best, Colonel Hedley," she said.

Miss Ainger was twenty-eight, purposeful and forthright. And as John Usher had said, there was an impressive charm about her. Her dark red hair, cornelian-toned, and her green eyes, gave her a rare beauty. Across her patrician nose and cheeks was a tiny constellation of pale freckles.

She thanked John Usher and Colonel Hedley for their kindness in welcoming her, then shot out the remark: "But I'm damned sure the rest of you didn't want me here!" Then after an awkward silence: "Well, I hope you won't let the fact that I'm a woman upset tradition. Go ahead and swear and smoke your foul pipes all you want. I'll try to make you feel comfortable by swearing a bit myself now and then. Please think of me as a man, as one of you. Sometimes I wish I'd been born a man."

John Usher smiled admiringly. "I'm sure we'll all work harmoniously," he assured her.

"Thank you, John. This is really a big moment for me. I've always wanted to be in Room 40. When I think of enemy messages being picked up by our listening stations, and sent into this Room to be deciphered, and then the tremendous things that follow—the attacks at sea, ships torpedoed, landings, bombing raids—it staggers one's imagination."

Sir Christopher interrupted with a warning.

"I must caution you, Miss Ainger, as I've cautioned every man in this Room: this is the most secret department of the Government. Outside of these four walls, not one word of our work must be spoken. In fact no one must know that you are in the Room."

"I understand," promised Miss Ainger.

"The background and life of every one of us is checked by Scotland Yard and the Intelligence. Inspector Chambers will want to ask you a lot of personal questions."

"Of course," smiled Miss Ainger. "I think the Inspector will find my life the proverbial open book. I'm twenty-eight, the daughter of a young Egyptologist who died in Cairo in 1913. My mother died a year later. My father named me Sudan because I was born in the Sudan."

"Well, I will arrange your transfer immediately," said Sir Christopher. "Just say nothing to anyone, and you will receive instructions. You can report here in the morning. I'm glad we're going to have you with us."

"Thank you, Sir Christopher."

Sir Christopher returned to his office.

"Have you had tea, Sudan?" said John Usher.

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"Well, come over here. I'm waiting for a Continental call." He led her over to the alcove, beyond the line of desks. He drew up a chair for her, while he sat close to the telephone.

Miss Ainger looked at Usher with the adoring look of a woman in love. "It was awfully good of you to help me into the Room," she said in her rich, throaty voice.

"Not at all," said Usher; "it really wasn't my doing at all. When you applied to Sir Christopher, he needed you and the doors opened."

"But you *did* root for me, didn't you?"

"Yes, I said something about you."

"I know those others didn't want me; I could *feel* their antagonism the moment I came in."

"My dear, don't think that. It's not antagonism; just stupid prejudice. But that won't last. You won them over at once. I could see that."

"I hope so. I want to get along with them."

Usher warned her: "Chambers will question you down to the last detail of your life."

"Okay, John, I can take it."

"About your trips abroad, too. He's very hot on that. I've been through it myself. I've had to explain all my

trips, and who I contacted. But it's all very necessary to the job."

"Okay. I'll give him a list of the bars I've visited, and the various cocktails I've drunk, and descriptions of the men who tried to make love to me," laughed Miss Ainger.

Usher feigned alarm. "How many men have tried to make love to you, Sudan?"

"Oh, several dozen."

"I believe it."

"Well, don't let it ruin your life, John. You know there's only one man—"

The telephone rang, and John Usher answered. There were some preliminaries in establishing identification; then: "St. Francis School?" asked Usher. "David? Oh, hello, son, how are you? Are you all right?" His voice was filled with love. "Listen, David, I want you to start home at once. . . . Yes, I know, David, it's an unpleasant business, but you're not safe there, and I want you here with me. . . . Now, listen, son, I'm going to meet you in Paris. Day after tomorrow. We'll spend the night in Paris, and visit the Phelps. Oh, yes, and we'll take in the Moulin Rouge too! You young rogue! And now I want to speak with Herr Steiner."

Usher gave Herr Steiner instructions for sending David to Paris. Usher would be there at the station to meet him, but if anything happened and he was not there, David was to proceed to the home of the Phelps and wait. The travel arrangements settled, David came back on the phone.

Usher heard: "I'm sorry I have to leave school, and Carl, my friend, but I'll be awfully glad to see you, Father. I love you very much. Good-by, Father."

Usher slowly replaced the receiver.

Miss Ainger leaned forward and her voice expressed deep solicitation. "John, must you go to Paris?"

"Yes, I've got to meet David."

"It may be dangerous in Paris—"

"Dangerous?"

"For you."

"I don't understand."

"I'm thinking of what you mean to this Room."

Usher brushed her fears aside.

"You love David, don't you?" said Miss Ainger. "You love him enough to risk your life?" Usher nodded. Then she said, quietly: "I love you too, just as you love David." Her hand touched his; and for a fleeting second John Usher's hand closed on hers—for the last time.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRIGUE AT THE ST. FRANCIS SCHOOL



THE St. Francis School in Berne was a huge chalet enchantingly situated; through the windows could be seen the majestic beauty of distant snowy mountains. The reception-room had a bare institutional look, with walls paneled in dark wood. There was a massive desk with a telephone, some book-cases, a few pictures, two of them reminding one of illustrations out of a German storybook. The furniture was peasant-made, painted and carved; and there was a heavy hanging lamp in keeping with the somber atmosphere.

David Usher replaced the telephone after his father's call from London.

"Oh, why did this war have to happen?" he asked sorrowfully of old Adolph Steiner beside him.

Steiner, the head, was middle-aged, with tousled iron-gray hair, and wore glasses. About to lose David, he was filled with a tender regret—for David was a splendid little English lad, well-bred, well-mannered, intelligent, and one of the boys for whom he had a real affection.

"I don't know why these things have to happen," said Herr Steiner, "but they just do. May God keep the war away from my beautiful country."

"I hope so, Herr Steiner," said David fervently. "But England is in it, and France, and maybe every country will be in it before it's over."

"Well, you must pack now," said Herr Steiner. "I must make hasty arrangements for your journey to Paris."

"I will write to you often," David promised; "and as soon as it's over I will come back to you, Herr Steiner."

"It is kind of you to say that, David."

Carl Eberling clattered down the staircase into the hall and hurried into the room.

"My father is coming!" he cried. "I've just seen him get out of the diligence down the road."

"Your father is coming from Rome," explained Herr Steiner to Carl. "He sent me a telegram. He is taking you home to Berlin, Carl."

"Oh, David!" exclaimed Carl.

Misery was suddenly written in Carl's face. He was a year older than David, blond, and wore thick-lensed glasses.

"And my father's just telephoned from London," said David. "I'm leaving for Paris. Isn't it awful?"

The breaking up of the touching school friendship affected Herr Steiner. He shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Carl," said David. "I'm going to miss you, and all the fun we'd planned this year. Now we won't learn to ski. At least, I won't. There's not enough snow in England for skiing."

"Sometimes there's heavy snow in the country outside Berlin," said Carl.

"Do you want my new skis, Carl?" David offered.

"Oh, thank you, but I don't think I should take them."

"Yes, you take them. And have fun with them. They'll be something for you to remember me by."

The two boys felt unhappy and diffident.

"Then, David, will you have my skates? Didn't you tell me the Serpentine in Hyde Park sometimes freezes over? Well, maybe it'll freeze this winter, and I'd like to think of you cutting figures with my skates."

THERE was the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall, and the next moment the porter showed in Herr Friedrich Eberling.

Carl's father was a pompous, thick-necked, red-faced German. He was dressed in a dark suit, with a great fawn overcoat. He was a big man, and he was puffing from the climb up the path, and he was terrifying and imperious. He looked straight at his son.

"Heil Hitler!" he rasped. His arm shot upward like the mast of a ship.

Instantly Carl became rigid, another Carl! His background was revealed as his little arm went up to greet his father. "Heil Hitler!" he answered.

Herr Eberling relaxed. He broke into a dry smile. "Well, how is my little Carl?" he said. "And greetings, Herr Steiner."

Herr Steiner nodded. "I received your telegram," he said. "I am sorry that we must lose Carl."

"All on account of the damned English!" exclaimed the German.

Carl looked at David, and Herr Steiner saw the boy wince. Finally Carl said very quietly:

"Father, this is my best friend, David Usher."

Carl's father glanced down at the little English boy. "Verdammt Engländer!" he muttered.

Carl said quickly, hoping that David would not feel hurt: "David and I were going to have such fun skiing and skating this winter. But now David is going home to London, and so we must write to each other."

"No letters from Germany will reach England after today," rasped Herr Eberling.

"But maybe letters can pass through Switzerland," said Carl.

"Nein!" said the German. "You will not write to the Engländer."

There was a poignant silence; then Herr Eberling commanded: "Go upstairs and pack your bags, Carl. We are leaving at once."

Herr Steiner said quietly to David: "You'd better go up and pack too, David. Perhaps I can persuade Herr Eberling to take you in the diligence to the railway station."

David wheeled and looked straight up into Herr Eberling's eyes.

"No, thank you," he said. "I think I prefer to go with the porter, Herr Steiner."

HE turned and went out into the hall, and Carl followed him up the staircase to their room. "Oh, David, I'm sorry if my father offended you," said Carl, linking his arm with David's.

"Never mind, Carl. I suppose that's what war does to people," answered David wisely. "But we won't let it change us, will we?"

"No, we will not," said Carl fervently.

The boys started packing. Carl paused after a few minutes and exclaimed:

"David! Don't think of what my father said. We must write to each other. There is nothing wrong about it, and it would be terrible if I didn't hear from you for years and years."

"That's how I feel, Carl."

"Well, then, let's write! I'm sure—somehow—that letters will go through Switzerland. Anyhow, let's try. Oh, I know! We'll write in code."

"In code?" repeated David, surprised.

"Yes, you see, my father is in the Cipher Bureau in Berlin," confided Carl. "My grandfather was the head of the Bureau in the last war. . . . Do you know anything about codes, David?"

Codes? . . . His father . . . David was discreetly silent.

"No? Well, look at this code, David." He rummaged among his books and found a blue sheet of paper on which he had scratched some code annotations. "My father invented this code. It is called the Eberling Code. We can use it. I'll show you."

Carl went over and closed the door, and the two boys sat on the edge of Carl's bed.

"We will write to each other in numerals. It is all based on a book. No one can ever read our code unless he knows the book. Here, David, here is the book for this code, which is No. 7." From among his things he got a copy of "Little Man, What Now?" by Hans Fallada. It was the original German edition. "Of course," said Carl, "other books can be used, but this is the book for No. 7 code. Now look. I want to write to you and say, 'Ich liebe dich—I love you.' First I write down the number of the book—7. Now here on page 23 I find the word *Ich*." He counted each word down from the top. *Ich* was the 103rd word. "So I write 7—for the book—23 for the page, and 103 for the number of the word. Like this: 723103. Now the next word, *liebe*. Here is *liebe* on page 89"—he counted again—"the 121st word. So we get 89121. And now *dich*." Carl found the word on page 172—the sixteenth word. So he wrote down 17216. "But that isn't all, David," he said. "You must reverse the numbers. See!" And Carl wrote the three numbers in reverse.

301327

12198

61271

"There you are, David—*Ich liebe dich*."

"That's rather clever, Carl."

"My father's a clever man," said Carl with the innate pomposity of the Prussian.

"But is this the only code they use?" asked David.

"Oh, no, they use hundreds of codes, but my father says no man in the world will ever break his down."

David stared at his little German friend oddly and incredulously. "But how did you get this code, Carl?" he asked.

Carl laughed impishly. The little devil said: "I stole it. I copied it out of a book in his desk one day."

David remonstrated. "But Carl, this code must be awfully important. Wasn't it wrong of you to steal it? And how did your father come to leave it in his desk?"

Carl laughed again. "Oh, it can't be wrong," he answered, "when I'm only going to use it with my school friends. I've always longed for a code, and now I have this one."

He got up and tiptoed to the door, to make sure that no one was about and listening; then he returned to David on the bed.

"This is how I got it," he said. His eyes were alight with his own crafty zeal. "One day two men from the Wilhelmstrasse came to visit Father. They came often, mostly week-ends, and Father always talked with them for hours locked in his study. But this time Father became ill, and the men sent for Gertrude, our housekeeper, who telephoned for the doctor. The men went away, and Gertrude got Father up to his room and in bed. When Doctor Kraus came, he said Father had had a heart attack and must rest for many days.

"Well, about the fifth day Father called me into his room and told me to close the door. He said he wanted me to do something for him, that it was very secret, and I must not let Gertrude know. He handed me his ring of keys and told me to go quietly into his study, unlock the lower right hand drawer, take out his black strong box, and bring it to him. He gave me a towel to wrap around it in case Gertrude should see me in the hall.

"So I did it. Gertrude was in the garden picking flowers, so she did not see me. Father asked me to come back in an hour to get the box and return it. I wondered. What was in the box? A code? I made up my mind I would find out. So when I returned the box, I opened it with one of the other keys on the ring. I looked inside. There were a lot of papers and some notebooks. One notebook was marked 'Eberling Ciphers.' There were a lot of codes, all numbered. One—No. 7—had something to do with the book, 'Little Man, What Now?' I had seen that book on Father's desk, so I quickly copied that code. Then I locked the notebook back in the black box, and locked the box back in the desk, and returned the keys to Father."

"But that was a mean trick against your father," said David.

"No, it wasn't!" Carl protested. "Nobody will ever see the code except me—and now you—for our letters, so how can that be against Father?"

"But what is your father going to do with his codes?"

"I don't know. They use codes in war, don't they?"

David said: "All right, Carl, I'll try to use the code and write you one day and tell you all my news, shall I?"

"Oh, yes, David, you must write me! No one will know what's in our letters. It'll be fun, don't you think?"

"I think it will be a jolly lot of fun," said David.

"Here, you'd better take this book, 'Little Man, What Now?' I can get another copy in Berlin."

But before Carl could drop the book into David's bag, a hard voice thundered up from below:

"Carl! Carl! Are you ready?"

Carl leaped off the bed and called down: "Yes, Father, I'm coming."

Carl threw the last of his clothes into his bags, snapped them closed, and pulled on his hat and coat.

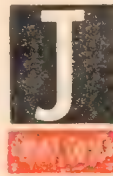
"Good-by, David."

"Good-by, Carl. And thanks for your skates. If the Serpentine freezes over I'll have a picture taken of me skating and send it to you. And will you send me a picture of you in the snow on your skis?"

Carl promised. The next moment he was flying down the staircase with his bags. David heard the partings below, and old Steiner's "*Auf wiedersehen, Carl! Auf wiedersehen!*" After that there was silence; and then David, packed and ready to leave also, went slowly and thoughtfully down the stairs.

CHAPTER FIVE

MURDER



JOHN USHER was packing a bag for his trip to Paris to meet David. With the aid of his Scotch housekeeper Libby, his dinner jacket, shirts and linens were soon neatly placed in the pigskin bag, and Libby summoned a taxi to the house in Lancaster Gate. Usher was looking forward to this trip with considerable zest. He loved Paris, and the brief voyage across the Channel to Calais, and the run through the French countryside with its rich autumn coloring and fresh green fields. And at the end of the journey he would speed across Paris to the Rue Victor Hugo to the home of his friend, George Phelps, and there David would be waiting.

The boat train left Victoria at eleven-fifteen. He would give himself twenty minutes to look into Room 40, to check the latest intercepts shot up through the pneumatic tube from the telegraphs, and to say good-by for a few days to Sir Christopher.

"There's your cab, Mr. Usher," called Libby, as the taxi drew up in front of the gray stone house.

"All right, Libby."

A moment later Libby had carried his bag to the front door.

"Good-by, Libby. I'll give David your love," said Usher.

"I'll give him my love myself, and mind you bring him back safely!" called Libby.

The taxi sped away toward Whitehall and the Admiralty.

It was a clean, crisp September morning, and the sun shone brilliantly on the Marble Arch as the cab flashed by into Park Lane. There was a traffic halt in Piccadilly. "Can't you get through? I've got a train to catch," Usher called to the driver. The driver sheered off and increased speed down St. James's Street into Pall Mall and a minute later stopped short before the Admiralty.

As Usher entered Room 40, he was instantly conscious of the tense atmosphere. Something unexpected had happened. Bevan, Cope and Waterlow were in a huddle at the big blackboard; and at a smaller board Colonel Hedley and Mason were checking the language tests: Miss Ainger was calling out letters in French and Italian.

Miss Ainger stopped short as Usher moved across toward Sir Christopher's office.

"Oh, good morning, John!" she called. "I—I didn't expect you to come. We've got a problem—"

She was interrupted by Sir Christopher, who had heard her greet Usher. He came quickly out of his office.

"Usher," he said, "I'm glad you've come! What a bit of luck! I've been telephoning your house, and the housekeeper said you'd left. I was about to send a messenger to Victoria to stop you."

"Yes. Well, what's up?"

"They've changed their code," said Sir Christopher. "The intercepts are in a different code, since four o'clock this morning. Sir Reginald Meade in the Admiralty has

been hammering at me for the intercepts, but we can't break it down."

"That means—"

"You must postpone your trip to Paris."

"Of course. I'll send a wire to my Paris friends. They'll keep David safely until I come."

"I'm genuinely sorry," said Sir Christopher, "because I know how much David means to you."

"Oh, don't you worry about David," replied Usher; "he'll be quite all right. This is the important thing."

"If you can break the code quickly, you can still get the early evening train to Dover."

"Well, we won't figure on anything just now except to find out what the enemy is up to. Why do you suppose they have changed code so quickly?"

Sir Christopher shrugged.

"They're up to something," said Usher. "You know, they know all about Room 40 over there across the North Sea, and naturally they're going to use different methods this time to trick us. Sometimes I have to smile about the secrecy of this Room. The Nazis know such a hell of a lot about us, and the British public knows little or nothing. Well, let me have a look at the latest intercepts." He removed his hat and coat, and put his bag behind his desk.

Sir Christopher opened the pneumatic tube that whirled up from the basement and plopped into the wicker basket. He handed Usher a batch of five fresh messages, picked up somewhere along the English east coast, all in the Nazi naval code.

Usher selected one of the messages; if he could break down that one he could read them all.

He went across to a blackboard and chalked up the numerals of the message in three columns:

221074	18128	89620
91263	06672	73012
44502	50713	03862
15962	84807	73929
90912	28505	20485
69378	19962	59391

He continued to complete the columns until the blackboard was filled with the figures.

His first task was to compile a frequency table. 90912 occurred four times; 15962 occurred three times; 20485 occurred twice. He completed the frequencies. As he worked, his brain was estimating the size and character of the code. The lowest number in the message was 00214, and the largest 91263. "About 85,000 words," Usher conjectured. Of these he must allow for approximately two thousand variants. Variants were the trick words. Words such as *come*, for instance, which may be designated by a score of different numbers to confuse the analyst. Also, as the message is diagrammed, the nulls will become apparent. Nulls are code symbols without meaning; these are sprinkled throughout a message to add further confusion.

As Usher's quickened brain fought to spot the first clue to the decipherment, his awareness of every trick and twist of the Nazi code-makers filled the niches of his mind. To him, the process was a battle, a phalanx of mental power arrayed against his own mental prowess; and each new decipherment aroused a routine of emotions. He could feel, more real than nebulous, the presence of the unseen enemy; he could feel them exulting in their cleverness, sitting back enjoying his discomfiture, laughing at him. This awareness angered him, drove him relentlessly in his determination to beat them.

The code eluded him. He applied the language tests. He called over Miss Ainger, who could speak five languages fluently.

They got a French, an Italian, a Spanish, and an English newspaper from the files. They counted off at ran-

dom in the text a number of words corresponding to the number of words in the code message. Translating, and using other newspaper groups for comparison, they sought the word that occurred most often. Omitting *A*, *OF* and *THE*, which were seldom used in code messages, the most frequent word was *BE*. Other frequencies, in order, were *IN*, *TO*, *WITH*, *BY* and *IS*.

But it was unlikely that the first word of the message was *BE*. In the end they were forced back to the conviction that the code was still in German. But what type of code were they dealing with?

The lunch hour came and went unnoticed. Usher never left the blackboard. Morgan brought in sandwiches and coffee, and the cryptographers ate automatically as they worked.

At three o'clock Sir Reginald was on the telephone to Sir Christopher Pelt.

"How soon will we have the translated intercepts?" he demanded.

Sir Christopher was noncommittal. The staff, he explained, was working at high tension; the moment the code was broken down he would send Morgan along with the translations.

"Keep the pressure up!" ordered Sir Reginald. "These latest messages, we think, are vital. Let me know the moment you're ready."

But at six o'clock the situation remained unchanged.

John Usher turned away from the blackboard, his face gray with strain. He lighted his pipe and relaxed for five minutes.

"I think," he said, "that Miss Ainger and Waterlow had better remain. We seem to have the matter fairly well squared away, and another hour should see the job done."

COLONEL HEDLEY and Mason showed sudden surprise at being dismissed before the code was broken down. Bevan remained silent. But Cope, the bad-tempered, took the order as a personal affront.

"You mean, you don't think we can be of any use?" he said.

Usher gazed steadily at him.

"I didn't say that and I don't mean that," he answered. "There's a possibility we may not succeed. We'll go on through the night if we have to, at least I will, but in the morning you'll have to carry on. You'll need your rest in that case."

Cope smiled coldly.

"I hope I'm going to have a chance at the difficult jobs, occasionally," he said.

"I imagine," returned Usher diplomatically, "there'll be plenty of difficult jobs for us all."

Colonel Hedley, Bevan and Mason left, wishing Usher luck, and Cope followed them out.

Sir Christopher, with his overcoat and hat on, came from his office and said to Usher: "John, Lady Pelt isn't very well, and I feel I must be at home this evening. But the minute you read the intercepts, get through to me and I'll come back immediately."

"I hope that will be shortly after dinner," said Usher.

"I hope so!" said Sir Christopher. "Sir Reginald is overanxious; we mustn't keep him waiting too long. There's evidently something big in the wind."

But John Usher had been overoptimistic. At eleven o'clock he still hadn't found the answer. There was something—some new trick, some variation—as yet unmastered. The code was in German. That was definite. It was not a dictionary code. Some twist, some mathematical formula—if only he could hit upon it! He would! He could feel the enemy out there somewhere in the shadows laughing. It would be his turn to laugh soon.

The blackboards were crowded with letters and numbers. The little group of three—Usher, Waterlow and

Miss Ainger—working quietly, tense, hour after hour, were approaching exhaustion, mental exhaustion. Their nerves were frayed. Usher had his coat off. Waterlow was smoking a filthy pipe; its fumes filled the Room.

Miss Ainger, fighting to maintain her stamina with the men, had made a strong pot of tea. It was Waterlow who had said that a woman might let them down: that a woman hadn't the nerves to stick it. Well, she hadn't any intention of funking it, although her brain was becoming muzzy and she was suffering from violent headache.

At one point she broke the depressing silence by exclaiming exasperatedly, "Why, *why* have they suddenly changed the cipher, I wonder!"

At that moment Morgan came in with a late *Evening News*. And there written in headlines was the answer to Miss Ainger's question: a dispatch announcing the Nazi attempted attack on the battle cruisers in Scapa Flow.

Usher took the paper from Morgan's hands and read the story. It was official, issued by the Admiralty.

It was a dramatic story of a British ambush laid for the attacking U-boats.

Certain information had been received, so the story ran, of a U-boat pack headed from a position northwest of Heligoland toward Scapa Flow. A flotilla of British destroyers was waiting for the U-boats. A swift and deadly battle had been fought out in the North Sea mist. The destroyers had surprised the U-boats. There had been a flaming broadside of guns, a fierce discharge of torpedoes. The U-boats had crash-dived. The low gray ragged sea had been churned into a maelstrom of volcanic eruptions by the depth-bombs, rocking the subs to hell under the British waters—ripping them to pieces, until fountains of oil marked their graves.

The Admiralty communiqué stated that five submarines had been definitely sunk.

"That was your work, John!" said Miss Ainger fervently. "It was a magnificent piece of deciphering."

But the public would never know that, although the Admiralty had sent across congratulations to Sir Christopher.

"Now you know why they suddenly changed their code," said John Usher quietly. "It's a clever ruse on the part of the Admiralty to say they received certain information; but they're not fooling Wilhelmstrasse: They know the information came from this Room."

THE news acted as a tonic, and Usher returned to the blackboard with renewed energy, controlling his taut nerves. At eleven-thirty he suddenly announced that he had found the key.

"The clever dogs!" he grinned. "It's the same cipher with a double transposition applied. It won't take me fifteen minutes to read the intercept."

Waterlow was at great pains to congratulate him; and to Miss Ainger he said dryly, "You helped a lot—you made a good pot of tea."

Usher chuckled. "There, Sudan," he said gently, "you'd better be going along now; I expect you're worn out."

"I'm as fresh as a daisy," protested Miss Ainger.

"You'll need to be as fresh as a daisy in the morning," said Usher, and helped her on with her coat.

Waterlow said, "I'm calling a taxi. Can I give you a lift?"

"No, thank you," said Miss Ainger, "I think I'll walk. The fresh air will do me good after seven hours of your pipe." To Usher she said: "Good luck in Paris. I'll be so happy to see David when you're back. Good night, John dear." And she went out.

Waterlow glanced after her with a tinge of admiration. "She's a clever young woman," he commented. "I

think now that Sir Christopher was right, bringing her in here. She's got the real bulldog spirit, especially when it comes to my pipe," he smiled. "Well, I'll be toddling along. See you in the morning. Good night."

"Good night, Waterlow, and thanks for your help."

It was eleven-forty by the clock on the wall as Waterlow left the Room. The only other person in the Room now was Morgan. He had seen Miss Ainger leave, and Waterlow. He sat at one of the desks sleepily toying with a jigsaw puzzle. Usher called to him: "Look here, Morgan, no use of you waiting. I'll go over to the Admiralty myself, a little later. So you'd better pop off. Good night."

Morgan got up, slipped the jigsaw pieces into his overcoat pocket, and pulled a woolen muffler around his neck. "Thank you, Mr. Usher," he said. "And give my best to the young 'un. We'll see him at one of these desks one day. Good night."

Usher was now alone in the Room. Some swift strokes on the blackboard, deft calculations, a massing and segregation of letters. Now the letters began to make sense. Words came, by syllables. Then the message. By God, he had it!

He rubbed out a space on one of the smaller boards and chalked it up carefully.

IT was an order to the *Graf Spee* in the South Atlantic ordering the raider to sink the British freighters *Orion*, *Jackal* and *Dundee* due to sail between this midnight and morning.

Usher hastily dialed the telephone and had Sir Christopher on the other end.

He said with caution: "Good evening, Sir Christopher. I have a bottle here if you'd like to drop around for a nightcap."

"Oh, good!" answered Sir Christopher. "I'm glad to hear your voice. I'll come right along."

There was the message, with all its savage significance, chalked on the board.

John Usher stretched, expanded his chest. His pipe had gone out; he struck a match and lit it. He moved about the Room, turning off the desk lights.

Inwardly he felt a glow of pride, of satisfaction, of triumph. He remembered his father's work, so highly effective; now he too was doing a good job for his country. A long way off the Nazis were flashing messages to their evil forces; already, in the first few hours of the war, he had broken down their ciphers, and was contributing to their ultimate defeat. The ambush of the U-boats outside Scapa Flow; and now an ambush to be laid for the *Graf Spee*. This was the part he was to play in the war, and he would see it through. Tomorrow he would be in Paris, and would have David with him. They would spend the night in Paris, and he would enjoy the intense pleasure he felt in palling around with his son. He was anxious now for morning to come. . . .

Down below, Sir Christopher stepped out of his Daimler and ordered his chauffeur to wait.

He entered the old building. He was quickly in the corridor. The lift man had gone home, so he hurried up the staircase and came to the door leading into Room 40. The door, as always, was locked. He knocked, but there was no response. He took out his private key, unlocked the door and entered, just as Big Ben, at the other end of Whitehall, was booming out the strokes of twelve o'clock.

One glance about, and he saw a sight that chilled him, that sent a shudder through his whole frame. On the floor at the foot of the blackboard lay John Usher in a triangle of blood, shot to death; and on the board above him the deciphered Nazi message, and all the letters and numerals relating to the cipher, had been hastily and smudgily erased.

CHAPTER SIX
WAS IT THE THUNDER OR—



WHILE the distant strokes of Big Ben were still crashing through the London night, Sir Christopher stood transfixed; and a host of wild theories crowded his brain. After the first shock, his mind began to function clearly. The first conviction that pierced his mind was that, certainly, the Nazis had struck this blow. Who else would want John Usher's life?

Whom else would his death most benefit? There was no one else in the Room, unless it was the murderer in hiding. He had dismissed the others, then, and had been alone when he telephoned. But how could a Nazi agent gain access to the Room? Well, there was no telling; this was war, and before it was over a million desperate chances would be taken by untold numbers of men.

Clearly it was a matter, and a most urgent and vital matter, for the British Intelligence.

Sir Christopher was aware that John Usher's brother, Robert, was a high officer in the Intelligence. He picked up the telephone and looked to see if the wire was still intact. Within thirty seconds he was on the telephone, and after a wait of several minutes he heard Robert's voice.

"Yes, Sir Christopher? How are you? I often hear of you through John—"

"Robert, can you come over to Room 40 at once?"

Robert caught the note of urgency in Sir Christopher's voice.

"Yes, I can if—"

"Something has happened. Come at once." He replaced the telephone.

Being a man without fear in face of danger, Sir Christopher moved about the Room, alone, in the semi-light. He made a hasty survey, and went into the adjoining rooms, into the Secret Ink Laboratory and the Photostat Room, switching on all the lights and peering into every closet and alcove, but the rooms were empty and there was not a trace of anyone in hiding.

There was a loud knock on the door; Sir Christopher opened it and Robert stepped into the Room.

Robert—in the image of his brother. There had been that bond between them since birth; this moment was to be doubly crucial, doubly tragic.

"Hello. Yes. What is it, Sir Christopher?"

Without answering, Sir Christopher's glance led Robert to the foot of the blackboard. Robert took a step forward, and stopped transfixed. He stood for a long minute looking down at his dead brother for whom he had cherished a deep and genuine love. You could feel the man's poignant emotion; his silence was terrible. In a few terse words Sir Christopher related what had happened.

When at last Robert spoke, he spoke as the Intelligence officer.

"Do you think the murderer was someone in the Room, or an agent from outside?"

The possibility that it was someone in the Room shocked Sir Christopher. He could not, in a flash, bring himself to believe that.

"I've been over the rooms—there's no evidence to indicate who did it," he replied.

Moving swiftly, Robert Usher made a thorough search of the premises: every door, every window, every access to the corridors. "I think our first step is to check everyone in the Room," he said.

The two men went into Sir Christopher's private office. "Who was here with John during the evening?" Usher asked.

Sir Christopher named Waterlow, the British Museum expert, Miss Ainger, and Morgan, the messenger. "But

you can dismiss them from all connection with this crime," he added.

"I'm dismissing no possibility," answered Usher sharply. "Any one of them may have killed my brother. Or he may have been murdered by another member of the staff. Or by an enemy agent from the outside, with full knowledge of events taking place in this Room, who may have gained an entrance at the moment when John was alone. In that case the agent would have known that he was alone. Isn't it significant, Sir Christopher, that John was shot precisely at the moment when he had discovered the key to the Nazi code, and before he could communicate the contents of the deciphered message to you or deliver it to the Admiralty? Doesn't that suggest that the motive for his death under these particular circumstances came from within this Room? I think in the end we shall find it so."

There was a pause, as Robert Usher leaned back in his chair and stared silently at the head of Room 40.

The exact likeness of the Intelligence officer to his dead brother struck Sir Christopher with uncanny force. He shuddered as he looked at the man. Even the voice: it seemed that he was speaking to John: that nothing had happened; and that he was carrying on precisely as he had a few hours before. There was the same magnetic personality, and the handsome sun-bronzed face with its noble forehead, steel-gray eyes, and decisive chin. It was a severe test not to realize that this was another man facing him.

Robert's voice was calm and grave. He spoke slowly, with strange words.

"We live in a world where there are only two forces: *Good and Evil*. Everything comes down to that; and everything that happens to any of us stems from one or the other. Why men should be evil is a circumstance beyond any of us to understand or explain. It seems that certain men align themselves from some inner instinct with Evil. The man who killed John was such a man. Groups of such men compose a nation; and nations can be as evil as an individual. The only chance that Evil has in this world is to masquerade as Good. But even then it will always be stamped out."

Again Robert paused. He was greatly impressed that a man could give himself to so fundamental an error as taking the life of his fellow man. "This matter is far more important than the physical death of my brother. John was always a good soldier and he has given his life. But the vital fact is that here, in this most secret of all Government departments, there is a spy, and a cunning and desperate one, who will stop at nothing to destroy the work of this Room. An act like this strikes at the very heart of England—at the safety of this island. We have got to find him, and destroy him, within the next few days."

He got up and paced the floor of the narrow room while a strange plot to trap the unknown agent shaped itself in his keen brain.

"I want to check first on Waterlow, Miss Ainger and Morgan," he said.

"Miss Ainger!" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "That's without reason. You must know that Miss Ainger was engaged to marry John."

"I know that she was very much in love with him," replied Robert. "On the surface any thought of accusation against her would seem bewildering; but women have loved before, and killed. No, I think we must include Miss Ainger in our first check-up."

SUDDENLY Robert halted and faced his listener. "If, tomorrow morning, John Usher walked as usual into this Room, removed his hat and coat, and hung his umbrella in its accustomed place on the rack, and sat at his desk and carried on with his work, it

would be a nerveless, machine-actuated robot, would it not, who would not show a flicker of emotion?"

"But," exclaimed Sir Christopher in astonishment, "do you propose— Do you mean that *you*—"

"Precisely," answered Robert. "And I shall want you to be present in the Room at the moment that I enter, and to note minutely the reaction and conduct of everyone in the Room."

"To accomplish this successfully, we must keep John's death a secret. No one must know. *No one*, except ourselves. I shall arrange that with the coroner, and a temporary burial will take place. There is a busy night ahead of us, Sir Christopher."

Sir Christopher recovered from his initial amazement. "But how can you work with the others unless you understand the codes?" he asked.

"I already know a good deal about cryptography," replied Robert. "From many conversations with John I learned the fundamentals. And you can instruct me further. Now, which was John's desk? Come, shall we set the stage?"

The men arose and passed into the Room.

THE next morning in Room 40 every detail appeared as regular and normal as on the preceding morning. The clock registered ten o'clock. The staff members were already at their desks, studying the latest intercepts that had been shot up by the pneumatic tube from the telegraphs. Mason and Waterlow were at the big blackboard chalking up strings of letters, comparing them with the code letters of yesterday's intercepts. Cope, Bevan and Colonel Hedley were at their desks. It had been raining, and Miss Ainger had come in at nine-forty, removed her rubbers, hung up her transparent raincoat, and taken up her position at her desk.

Sir Christopher emerged casually from his private office and passed among the staff members, greeting them, and commenting upon the character of the fresh intercepts. Morgan sat at one side of the room, near the entrance to the Secret Ink Laboratory, drawing on his pipe, a chipped briar, and ponderously arranging the bits and pieces of the jigsaw puzzle which he had extracted from his overcoat pocket. It whiled away the time as he waited. The Room had settled into its routine. It was as if the terrible tragedy had not occurred here the night before. There was not the slightest circumstance to betray it. John Usher alone was absent: everyone in the Room knew that he was going to Paris to meet his son journeying from Switzerland. That he was now in Paris, or *en route*, was taken for granted.

It was raining hard outside, and flashes of lightning illumined the Room, and were followed by crashing peals of thunder. From the west window Sir Christopher looked out at the gaunt, gray Admiralty Arch, and beyond to the soft green slopes lining the Mall. The hands of the clock indicated ten-five. From his position, Sir Christopher's eyes encompassed the whole Room. He waited, two, three, minutes. Then the door opened and, accompanied by a terrific crash of thunder, John Usher, to the life, walked in.

His movements, utterly commonplace in themselves, were fraught with drama. Looking neither to left or right, apparently seeing no one, he advanced straight to his desk. He removed his bowler hat and hung it, with his open, dripping umbrella, on a hook beside his desk. He slowly removed his dark, smart-fitting overcoat, and hung it, too, on a hook on the rack. He wore the same baggy gray trousers and blue tweed coat that he had worn the day before; and as he sat down he extracted his pipe from his coat pocket.

Colonel Hedley's desk was adjoining Usher's, and he greeted him: "Morning, Usher! Hear you cracked the cipher after we left last night."

The man who was John Usher answered: "Yes, Hedley. Double transposition. That's what led us up the garden."

Slowly, Usher lighted his pipe.

"Well, what are they up to again today, Colonel? Have they changed the cipher again?"

"No, I don't think so." Suddenly Hedley broke off: "Weren't you to be in Paris this morning?"

"Yes, but I telegraphed David I couldn't get away; I've asked Phelps to put him on the train for Calais. He's old enough to come through by himself now."

Exactly two minutes that action had required. But during those two minutes Sir Christopher had made his observations. Three unexpected things had happened:

Primarily, Sir Christopher had been awed by the Intelligence official's superb cleverness. Robert Usher was in the exact image of his dead brother; but he displayed also the same quiet, magnetic personality that made you feel his reserve strength. His appearance, his voice, his mannerisms—it was so damned uncanny. What Robert Usher's undercurrent of emotions were, as he went about studying the intercepts on his desk, no one but himself knew at that moment. His long training in the Intelligence alone accounted for his consummate acting.

The instant that he had walked into the Room, Sir Christopher had swiftly observed—

Miss Ainger: Half a minute before, Miss Ainger had taken a handful of pencils across to the metal sharpener on the wall and had sharply pointed them. She had returned to her desk, opened her bag, and taken out a small mirror and studied her face. It was a pretty face, with full, rich lips, and that adorable triangle of pale freckles which added to her peculiar beauty. But her lips needed more coloring; she had delicately touched them up with her geranium lipstick, and seemed pleased—when her eyes beheld John Usher in the mirror. The movement of her hand fluttered, stopped dead for a split-second; her face had paled, and the metal-encased lipstick rattled to the desk. Her eyes left the mirror, and her head jerked nervously in the direction of Usher. Then as quickly she looked away again, recovered the lipstick, and buried herself in the intercepts before her.

Cope: At the critical moment, he too was seated at his desk. As Usher came in, he was in the act of lighting a cigarette. As Usher's figure came within the line of his vision he had paused, and stared, long enough for the match to burn his fingers; he had quickly dropped it and lighted another, and fumblingly got his cigarette going. But evidently the appearance of Usher had upset him. He got up and went over to the water bottle and drew himself a drink in a paper cup; and as he drank his eyes slyly slanted across to Usher. He watched him concentratedly as he was hanging up his hat and umbrella; then, in what seemed an effort to cover up his surprise, he feebly whistled a few bars of "The Lambeth Walk" and returned to his desk and awkwardly settled to his work.

Morgan: The messenger, who was seated some distance away from the entrance to the Room, had been absorbed in piecing together the jigsaw puzzle. As he saw Usher come in, his hand had jerked spasmodically; the neat puzzle had been scrambled. Whether this was caused by the unexpected appearance of Usher, or was a natural action, Sir Christopher was uncertain. For the reverberation of the thunder, bursting like a thousand guns, had at that moment savagely rattled the windows. Morgan, after attempting to replace the scattered pieces, suddenly abandoned all interest in the puzzle, scooped up the pieces, and thrust them into his overcoat pocket.

BUT the other men in the Room had given no sign of surprise, had not faltered for an instant in their work. Mason and Waterlow, although conscious of Usher's entrance, had not been diverted from the jumble of letters on the blackboard.

"Which," thought Sir Christopher Pelt, "is something I could never have done, had I left John Usher shot to death on the floor of this Room the night before, heard not one word about his death, and with my own eyes saw him walk in in the morning, alive, seat himself at his desk, and go about his daily routine as though nothing had happened. Good God, what manner of man can this spy be!"

An hour later, behind locked doors in his private office, Sir Christopher reported in minute detail his observations to Robert Usher. Robert, dressed in his dead brother's clothes, listened with quiet intensity. It was immediately evident that Robert's anxiety was not for vengeance, though he was still deeply and sadly moved, but for safeguarding England's vital interests. It was an audacious act for the Nazis to place a spy in the British Code Room: unless the spy was scotched at once the whole purpose of Room 40 might be thwarted; indeed, further tragic events could be expected.

On the face of it Robert agreed that it seemed unlikely that old Morgan, the messenger, could be a Nazi secret agent, not hesitating to murder in a most cold-blooded manner; and certainly he could not place Miss Ainger in that category. Miss Ainger, he knew, had known his brother John intimately, was in love with him, and was very fond of David. Still, the rule was that the most innocent-appearing person would be used. As for Cope, the scholarly Oxonian, he had a fine, loyal record.

"Will you let me see the credentials of all the staff, Sir Christopher?" asked Robert.

Sir Christopher laid them before the Intelligence officer.

According to the records, as Usher checked them, only one had ever been in Germany. Cope, in 1935, had gone on a walking tour with three other Oxonians to the Black Forest. The four men had not separated and had returned direct to England after the month's holiday.

"I see that Miss Ainger and Morgan have never crossed the frontiers into Germany. At least that is their declaration," said Robert Usher. He checked over the varied details of their careers. "All good clean English records," he summarized. Then he revealed a piece of important information to Sir Christopher.

"The spy," he said, "would almost certainly have an ally in London from whom he would receive orders and to whom he would report. For instance, the moment you break down a cipher that information would be relayed to Berlin and the cipher, or code, would be changed. Isn't that what has probably happened? The cipher was changed, John succeeded in breaking the new formula, and paid for it with his life.

"Now, the Intelligence knows that the man who is the master agent of the Nazis in England is here in London. You can take it as a certainty, Sir Christopher, that there is a connection between the spy in Room 40 and this man. Confidentially, we know who he is. He is being kept under strict surveillance. It's valuable to us just now to give him plenty of rope, and freedom. At the properly-timed moment I shall step in with an invitation to visit the Tower, and for breakfast he'll be fed a diet of long British rifles. There is this about him: he has very skillfully camouflaged his real identity. He is well known as 'Josef,' he is actually a Hungarian, and for a number of years he has been the proprietor of a restaurant in Greek Street, Soho, known as 'The Dalmatian Peasant.' If now I can trace a connection between our suspects and the Dalmatian Peasant, we will have found this dangerous agent."

Robert Usher leaned forward eagerly in his chair.

"Give me three days," he demanded of Sir Christopher. "I will devote myself first to old Morgan, who appears to be a paragon of stolid British virtues, then to Miss Ainger, certainly a young woman of intense charm, and finally to our scholarly friend Cope. Three days—and I will

know if it was the peal of thunder or John suddenly returned to life, which startled them. If it was John we will have in our hands the subtlest, deadliest enemy that I have ever encountered."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ST. PANCRAS ROOF



ALFRED MORGAN lived a quiet, detached, utterly humdrum life. So commonplace, in fact, that its very pattern was open to suspicion of deeper things. He was a Yorkshireman, and he spoke with the faint accent of that northern county. He had no relatives in London; indeed, remarkably few friends. He was a man of some education, and he spent much of his spare time reading in the British Museum—notably books on ordnance and poisons, Robert Usher discovered. He lived alone in digs in an old Georgian house next to the great St. Pancras railway station. This house, in Wilsted Street, off Euston Road, was run by a widow named Mrs. Apsley who had a young son, Tom. Everything, in fact, that Usher could check against Morgan seemed circumspect and dull middle class. And yet—

In the early London dusk Usher quietly left Room 40, picked up a taxi cruising through Whitehall, and told the driver to take him to St. Pancras.

By the time Usher stepped from the cab twenty minutes later, the London night, black and grim and steeped in terror in its utter blackout, had enveloped the city. The cab quickly drew off. Usher lost himself in the throngs hurrying into the mammoth station. But a moment later he emerged from the human stream coursing like ants. He possessed a remarkable knowledge of this section of London, from Regents Park across to the Wenlock. He groped his way in the darkness through an alley and a hidden mews to the rear of Wilsted's cluster of old gloomy houses. Morgan's house was Number 29. If anything, it was more dilapidated and frightening in its aspect than the other houses. He gave a searching glance to right and left along the alley, to make certain that he was not followed. Then swiftly he thrust his hat and attaché case into an empty garbage pail, to avoid detection in his upward journey. He maneuvered the four flights of wooden stairs without meeting anyone. He set the pail down quietly, recovered his hat, and flung the attaché case ten feet above on a flange of the roof. In another moment he had climbed up by means of a drainpipe. He stood amidst a world of begrimed chimney-pots, looking like a forest of dead trees.

Off to the right, adjoining the house roofs, was the enormous St. Pancras station roof, with its acre of iron girders and glass panes. Below, Usher could see, dimly through the smudge, the panting locomotives, the long line of coaches, the crowds milling on the platforms.

It was a simple matter, even in the darkness, for Usher to open the skylight that looked down into Morgan's top-story back room. Opening the attaché case, he uncoiled the rope, and fastened one end securely around the bricks of the nearest chimney. He dropped the other end through the open skylight down into the room below. And in another moment he had let himself down by the rope and stood alone in the center of the silent room.

He flashed his torch about, and the search began.

Working noiselessly, Usher went through that room with the deft strokes of a burglar. He had chosen this procedure because he would have to come back again this night; and he hesitated to take Mrs. Apsley into his confidence. She and Morgan were unquestionably friendly, and the risk of betrayal was too great.

The room was not large, and exactly as he had pictured it. There was the brass bed, the washstand with its bowl and pitcher, a chest of drawers, a small desk, and a bookcase. Usher rummaged through them all—desk, drawers, clothes-closet, clothes, books, bed—checking every detail. There were no incriminating papers, no letters or notes other than personal and proper documents.

"Seems all right," commented Usher to himself. Then he set a trap. He took a sheet of blank paper from his pocket and with a stub of a pencil printed this message:

REPORT AT ONCE.

He pulled down the bed covers and planted the note over Morgan's blue flannel pajamas, lying under the pillow. He replaced the covers and smoothed them out.

Two minutes later he had climbed back up the rope to the roof. He drew up the rope and closed the skylight.

Sir Christopher, he knew, would detain Morgan until he arrived back in the Room. A taxi trundled him slowly through the blackout. Every night now for the duration the city would be like this, darkened like the Stygian night into oblivion, and the nine million people of Greater London must endure it and accommodate their lives to it. What a world for adventurers and criminals, always seeking darkness!

As he went up to Room 40, Usher hoped that the Germans had not changed the code again. If so, there would be an immediate demand for his presence, and he dare not avoid the pressure upon him. If it came to the crisis, he had no fear but that he would acquit himself favorably. He knew all the fundamentals, about codes. Those days in the summer cottage at Cookham with John had not been idle days. And Sir Christopher had supplied the routine and the formulas. But now, for the next forty-eight hours, he had desperate work to do.

The staff had caught up with the intercepts. Thank God, there was no change! Miss Ainger had already gone home, and Cope and Waterlow were preparing to leave.

"All right, Morgan, you needn't wait," said Sir Christopher to the messenger.

"Thank you, sir."

As Morgan cluttered down the staircase, Usher was close behind him.

"Well, Morgan, David will be home tomorrow."

"Oh, that will be nice for you, sir. I hope you'll bring him along one day."

"I'm afraid I won't be able to keep him away. That lad's got a cryptographic brain."

"He has, sir, he has that."

They crossed Trafalgar Square, past the giant lions, and came to St. Martin-in-the-Fields, where Morgan usually caught his bus.

"Morgan, will you have a pernod with me? I know a good spot, the York Minster."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Usher. I haven't had a pernod in years."

They struck off through the darkness, up St. Martin's Lane into Soho.

INSIDE the York Minster the lights were bright. The atmosphere was stifling. The air was hot and blue with smoke. The bar was lined with men and a few women; the seats along the side were crowded, too. Usher ordered the drinks. The barman poured the amber liquid into two glasses, and placed them under the water globe and let the water drip slowly through the sugar cubes. When the glasses were milky he pushed them forward across the bar.

Morgan became voluble with the drink. He talked of his part in the last war. He'd seen hard going—the

massacres at Messines and Wyttschaete, and the man-made earthquake at Messines Ridge. The massacre of the Germans there had been terrifying, he said. Heads, arms, legs, torsos—what had been men—returned to the convulsive earth as fragments of earth. Morgan had been caught by the strafing of the German guns. His head was bleeding freely; a long ugly gash had opened in his arm. But he'd refused to go to hospital for eleven hours, until he saw the artillery barrage ended and a swarm of planes rise above Wyttschaete Wood. Then they carried him in, half dead.

"Good God, I didn't know you'd been at Messines," Usher said.

A moment later he said: "Look here, Morgan, will you have a spot of food with me?"

"That's very kind of you, sir."

"Where would you like to go?"

"Anywhere—the Troc?"

"No, I know a top spot. Best onion soup in town. And they fly their *pâté de foie gras* from Zagreb. Do you know the Dalmatian Peasant in upper Greek Street?"

"The—" There was a split-second's hesitation, a flicker, which might mean one thing, or might mean nothing. "The Peasant? I've heard of it—I've never been there."

"Well, finish your drink and we'll trot along."

THE Dalmatian Peasant is an easy five minutes from the York Minster. The two men went across Dean Street and Frith Street and headed up Greek Street toward Soho Square. People, groping through darkness, were searching out the locations of favorite restaurants. Heavy hangings covered the open doorway of the Peasant. Usher dived through, followed by Morgan, into a narrow entrance hall; then they parted a second set of hangings and came into the warm, lighted heart of the restaurant.

The place was pretty well filled, and there was a conversational murmur over the whole room. Usher watched Morgan shrewdly as Josef came quickly forward.

"Good evening, gentlemen. For two?" he smiled.

"Yes, please," assented Usher.

"Will you come this way?"

Josef led them across the room to a sofa table at the far end. The table was small, and dimly lighted by a shaded candle. When they were seated, Josef handed them each a gaudily decorated menu.

"Cocktail, gentlemen?"

"Morgan?"

"I think, a doctor."

"Two doctors. And we'll have some of your *pâté*, and that good onion soup."

Josef smiled. He seemed very pleased. "Yes, it is very good," he said; and moved away among the tables.

The Nazi master agent was a short, slim man with a long, narrow black mustache; his face was alert and fox-like; there was something unearthly in his bright, gimlet eyes, something that made you feel he was hellishly clever. But there was not a sign that he had ever before laid those strange eyes of his upon the messenger for Room 40.

Morgan looked about the place with unstinted curiosity. He was amused at the blue and red and golden yellow murals of the Dalmatian country scenes, flaming with color, and at the Dalmatian costumes of the waiters, all of whom were foreigners. Usher reminded him that famous Londoners came here, artists and writers and statesmen. If you asked anyone about Soho restaurants you were certain to get one answer: "Oh, and you must go to the Peasant!"

Usher was a pleasant, genial host. He and Morgan drank their doctors. By now the *pâté* had been served. It was a rich dish for the prosaic messenger, but he rel-

ished it. And with the onion soup came his story of love and Mrs. Apsley.

Alfred Morgan was in royal form. The pernod and the doctor made him confidential. Usher was his good friend; and he was in love with Mrs. Apsley. The landlady, he said, was a widow, and she had this brat Tom, and he often took Tom to the Zoo to see the giant polar bears on the Mappin terraces. He seemed a little anxious about Mrs. Apsley's affection for him. But he had high hopes. She came from a good Norwood family. She knew he had once been a commissionaire for a swanky West End bank. But now he was in the Government service. "She's always hinting to know what I'm doing," he drooled, "and of course I can't tell her about Room 40. If I could I think she'd be proud of me and marry me tomorrow. So where am I? . . . Gad, this is good soup!"

"Tell her your work is a military secret."

Morgan chuckled. "Ever tell a woman there's a military secret in your life? Try it some time. . . . Gad, best onion soup I ever tasted!"

Usher ordered two kummels at the end of the dinner, and a cigar for Morgan. He breathed, freely when he was out on the street again, and away from those garish murals and the drooling about the widow of Wilsted Street.

Overhead, the night was aglow with stars. He and Morgan felt their way through the Square into Oxford Street. There he bade the messenger good night. Morgan thanked him effusively; it had been a rare and wonderful evening. "And remember me to David. Thank you, John." *John!* He had not suspected. Robert Usher smiled grimly in the darkness. "And now I'll pick up a bus at the corner. Good night."

Morgan went off in the direction of Charing Cross Road; and Usher cut back quickly through the Square and into Shaftesbury Avenue. There he found a taxi and within fifteen minutes he was slipping through the ink-black alley and mews behind the Wilsted Street row of Georgian houses.

He passed softly and noiselessly up the four flights of stairs, swung up by the drain-pipe, and lay shivering on the roof-top in the raw, cold September night.

Morgan's skylight was dark. The taxi, of course, had traveled swifter than the bus.

USHER waited, minute after minute, in expectancy of seeing the light flash on in the room below. He was surrounded by sounds. Off to his left was the vast acreage of the St. Pancras station roof. Faint light pushed up through the heavily-smudged glass panes. He could hear the *chug-chugging* of the great locomotives like the beat of a master organ. He could hear the distant roar of the city thundering with its dynamic power.

He waited in grave suspense, chilled to the bone, and impatient. It was now nine thirty-five. Where was Morgan? Had he stopped below in Mrs. Apsley's sitting-room for a chat with the widow from Norwood? Truly, he was in fine fettle after his dinner and kummel; was this the night that he would urge his amorous intentions? Usher hoped not, for he twitched uncomfortably on the damp, hard, slippery roof and prayed to heaven for the light to flash on.

Suddenly the grimy skylight flared with light. Staring down, Usher saw the messenger moving about. He removed his overcoat and spread his evening paper on the table. "I hope he doesn't spend the rest of the evening reading that blasted paper," thought Usher. Apparently his wish was to be granted. Morgan began undressing. He prepared for bed. He removed his coat and waistcoat, and sat on the edge of the bed and unlaced his boots. He got up and went over to the chest of drawers and wound his clock. He removed his toupee, and

pulled on a nightcap. Usher laughed. Old Morgan in his nightcap! If Mrs. Apsley could see him now! Then he reached out and pulled down the bed covering to get at his pajamas. At that moment his eye caught sight of the note entangled with the pajamas.

Usher on the roof watched with intense curiosity as Morgan read it. Half a minute passed: Morgan struggled to absorb its meaning, to interpret its cryptic order.

Usher speculated. Would Morgan react by hurrying from the house? To whom would he report? To Josef? Or to some other lesser Nazi agent? Watching closely, Usher could interpret the messenger's brain processes. Whatever significance Morgan would give the command was as yet indeterminate; but it was obvious that he was puzzling out the manner in which the note got there. Who had come into his room? Would Mrs. Apsley admit an unknown to his room? Or— For a fleeting instant he glanced upward toward the skylight, and Usher started back. He was quite sure he had not been seen.

SUDDENLY the messenger for Room 40 became galvanized into life: he removed his nightcap, replaced his toupee; he hastily laced up his boots, pulled on his waistcoat, his coat, and his overcoat over that, stuffed his hat on his head, and crossed over and turned out his light. He went hastily out.

Instantly Usher turned away from the darkened skylight. He rose from his cramped position and started over the roof.

He had hardly taken two steps when he paused dead in his tracks.

The thing that he saw was a man's black figure, with hat pulled low on his head and coat collar turned up, silhouetted against the faintly-lighted panes of glass atop the great railway station, not thirty feet away.

Instinctively, swiftly, Usher realized that the man had been spying upon him—watching him while he had been watching Morgan below. Then in a split-second he experienced his second reaction: there was not a moment to lose if he was to gain the street and shadow Morgan.

He moved forward—straight toward the unknown.

Suddenly the poised figure came alive, crouched and darted away over the roof, weaving between the islands of black chimney-pots. Usher was after him, running through the pitiless darkness; he leaped from the one damp, slippery roof to the next roof, taking a dangerous chance with his life. As he gained upon the fleeing figure he shouted, "Stop! Stop!" And suddenly the man swerved and made for the great sloping glass roof of the station.

On his hands and knees he climbed laboriously up the steep, narrow metal brace seventy feet to the roof-tree. One slip and he would crash down through the glass onto the crowded platform below.

With an urgent lunge forward, Usher was after him. He could kill two birds: discover the fellow's identity, perhaps knock him out; and gain the street from the other side of the station. But the fellow turned at the crest; there were two jets of flame from a revolver, and the bullets whined perilously close to Usher's head. He threw himself flat on the metal brace. The next second the unknown assailant disappeared over the edge of the high roof.

With all his agility Usher clambered to the roof-tree, and swung down the opposite side, dropping a dozen feet into a twisting black alley. Some hundred feet away he dimly discerned the fleeing figure, and took after him. The chase led around into the mews, and skirted a fishmonger's rear where two lovers were locked in embrace against a barrow. The escaping man, tearing through the dark, crashed into the barrow, then swung away to the right, skirting a brick wall. Usher heard the torrent of cockney oaths as he sped past. "Wot the bleedin'

"ell! Nice goings-on, that's wot!" The cockney and his girl were scrambling, legs up, in a ditch. Nice goings-on, indeed!

Usher clung to the shadow of the wall, lest the man turn and fire again. He was a desperate foe intent on escape, and human life meant little at his hands. The Intelligence officer was so close upon him now that he could hear his heavy breathing. And unexpectedly a door opened twenty feet ahead, and a path of light burst forth in the darkness. The glare fell full upon the face of the escaping man, turned toward the open door. In that fleeting second Usher saw his features. The face was Teutonic, grim, set and strained from the chase. It was a desperate, evil face, that of a man about thirty-three or -five.

Fifty yards farther on was the end of the passage: a blank wall. They were in a *cul-de-sac*. When the fellow saw this he wheeled and darted back toward Usher, and, seeing him close upon his heels, kicked a fat barrel in his way, which upset Usher and sent him spinning against the brick wall. Then, thinking to negotiate the high end wall, he made a flying leap at it, gripped the top, drew himself up and plunged over into the void beyond. Usher, scrambling to his feet, heard a piercing cry. Kicking the barrel over against the wall, he stood upon it and looked down. His eyes had become cat's eyes in the darkness; he saw, indistinctly, the crumpled human form lying entangled in a mass of junked machinery. A strangled, choking cry came from the man—his head had been split open, probably fractured, from his fall. He lay helpless, captive, moaning in pain.

But Morgan? Another few seconds of this, a precious minute lost over the stricken German, and Usher would lose the trail of the messenger. The fellow was probably so badly hurt that he couldn't escape anyhow. Usher could return later.

His decision was fortunate. As he gained the street he saw, at the near corner, Morgan calmly mounting a bus which had just pulled in at the curb. A bus, significantly, that would carry him back into Oxford Street, to the purlieu of Soho Square. Back to the Dalmatian Peasant!

Usher hailed a passing taxi, and ordered the driver to follow the bus. Was the suspected messenger headed back to the master, Josef? But the bus had hardly traveled half a mile when an astonishing thing happened. Morgan got off the bus at Euston Square, crossed the road and caught another bus: this one routed down Tottenham Court Road and Whitehall, where lay Room 40! Usher's brain was active: was Morgan aware that he was being shadowed? Had he suddenly changed his plan?

The taxi, speeding ahead of the bus, was the first to reach the Admiralty. Sir Christopher Pelt had just returned from a conference with Sir Reginald Meade. Usher entered hurriedly and in a few terse words explained that Morgan was on his way here. Something had happened—he would explain later—but now they must receive the messenger in an unsuspicious manner.

FIVE minutes later Morgan entered the Room and confronted Usher and Sir Christopher conferring over a batch of intercepts. "I thought you had gone home, Mr. Usher," he said.

"No; I had some work to finish here."

"Well, see here, after I left you and went home I found this note in my room. Queer sort of note. Look at it."

The old man's manner was convincingly naïve, and his explanation of his presence here was simple and direct. He took the note from his pocket and showed it to the two officials.

"Report at once—" Strange, I thought. Why didn't you telephone? But I came straight away."

Sir Christopher studied the note.

"But we didn't send for you," he declared. "Someone else left this note. Who was it, Morgan?"

Complete bewilderment was reflected in Morgan's face. "It wasn't you who sent for me?" he asked, surprised. "Then who was it?"

Usher said calmly: "You would be the best judge of that, Morgan."

"But I haven't any idea," the messenger stammered. "Could it be a joke? Could Tom—" He looked dejected and embarrassed. "I'm sorry if I've disturbed you!"

"Not at all," said Sir Christopher. "Some mistake, I expect. Good night."

Morgan left. Usher exclaimed: "That's a damned strange business!" The story of the adventure on the St. Pancras roof was soon told. "Who was the fellow spying on the roof—watching me? Why did he try to kill me? There's only one answer to that: Josef knows what's happened in this Room, and he was one of Josef's men. But Morgan—why did Morgan take one bus, the wrong bus—or did he board it intentionally?—to come here, and then suddenly change? Was he going back to see Josef, did something warn him, and did he come here pretending that we had sent him that note? Is that what you make of it, Sir Christopher?"

Sir Christopher shrugged. "I never would have thought it of Morgan," he replied.

"Whoever our man is, your emotions are due for a shock," said Usher. "And now I must hurry back to that pile of machinery behind the station. There's a man there who can tell us something."

But when Usher crept through the *cul-de-sac* and vaulted the high wall, the German was gone. In the light of the torch he beheld only a splotch of blood staining the jagged, rusted steel.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HOUSEBOAT AMELIA



DAVID arrived at Victoria at four-twenty, and Robert Usher was on the platform to greet him. He was an attractive little fellow as he opened the carriage door and stepped out. Usher quickly caught sight of him; he ordered a porter to fetch his bags; he gathered David into his arms as he said:

"Hello, David! I'm glad to see you!"

For an instant David was puzzled. His Uncle Robert was dressed in his father's clothes.

"I'm glad to see you, Uncle Robert," he said, with a happy smile. "Where's Father? Was he too busy to come?"

"Well, it was more convenient for me to meet you," Robert said. "Here are your bags. Hop into that taxi over there."

Usher tipped the porter; ordered the taxi to Lancaster Gate; got in beside David.

David was eager for news.

"How's everybody, Uncle Robert? How's Libby?"

"Libby's splendid; she's eager to see you again."

"And how's Miss Ainger?"

"Very well, David. I expect she'll be at the house to greet you."

"Oh, I hope so! She's awfully nice. I had a long letter from her. And is Tannhäuser all right?" Tannhäuser was David's pet police dog.

Usher assured David that Tannhäuser was still a sturdy little gentleman. He asked about the trip from Paris. Everything had gone well, David said, but the Channel was rough, and he was glad to see the white cliffs of England. . . . Robert listened with stifled heart to David's recital; he knew that in a few moments the lad would

face the most poignant moment of his life. It was doubly tragic, because David looked forward so eagerly to his home, and those who made it an abode of love. All his life he had known only tenderness and gentility; and the love between father and son had been rich and searching. . . . But there were those who must not know of the terrible thing that had happened. Already, Libby had accepted him, Robert, as John; but it was Miss Ainger, who was a frequent, welcome visitor to the house, who was the danger point. David's rôle in the drama must be a delicate and vital one. It would not be an easy one.

At the entrance to Kensington Gardens, Robert sent the cab on with the bags. "We'll walk across the park, David," he said; "I want to have a talk with you, son."

David was quick to sense the grave note in his uncle's tone. "Why, Uncle Robert? What is it you want to say?"

They reached the Peter Pan statue and sat down on a park bench.

The late afternoon sunlight streamed palely across the glowing esplanade. In the distance the Serpentine lay like a sheet of beautiful cobalt.

And here in the peace and beauty of the gardens Robert Usher told David about his father's death. There was a stark silence when he had finished; then the little fellow's emotions gave vent to a burst of tears. "Oh, Father, I won't see you ever again!"

Robert's arm was firmly around his shoulders. "David, there's something else that I must tell you. You've got to listen carefully, and you've got to be brave, and you've got to help me."

"Yes, Uncle Robert?" Usher felt his little body stiffen with resolve.

"It's something your father would want you to do." There was a pause, and David waited anxiously. "You know, David, how secret and important the work of Room 40 is, don't you? The one who struck down your father did so to destroy the work of the Room. Well, I've taken the place of your father, David. The whole Room believes that I'm John Usher, except, of course, the one who killed him. That person is a secret agent, and a dangerous one. But I'm going to discover him. And then the work of the Room can go on with safety. Do you understand all this, David?"

"Yes, I understand, Uncle Robert."

"From this moment, David, you are to look upon me as your father—as John Usher. Before Libby, before Miss Ainger, before everyone who comes into the house. You must be very careful and never make a mistake. Will you?"

"Yes, of course I will."

Robert Usher's arm tightened around the little fellow. "And from this moment I *shall* be a father to you, David. You shall be my little son, and I shall do everything for your happiness that John would have done. You know how I loved my brother, and you know how I love you."

Robert saw David's effort to hold back the tears.

"Come, now, son; we will go home," said Robert.

LIBBY, the housekeeper, announced that Miss Ainger had come for tea and to welcome David home. Miss Ainger came in in a gay and happy spirit; she threw her arms around David with a tender, affectionate welcome. She said in her gentle, fervent way, "Oh, John, dear, I'm so glad David's safely home!" . . . *John!*

Robert Usher said, "Tell Miss Ainger how the news of the war affected the boys at St. Francis."

"Yes, Father."

Libby served tea, and over the tea David chatted about his school friends, and especially about the little German boy, Carl, and the wonderful trips they used to take.

Miss Ainger said: "Tell me about your trips, David."

David's eyes brightened and he talked enthusiastically about a trip that Steiner had taken with the boys to

Oberammergau in Lower Bavaria. "We saw the people in the village," he said, "the ones who play in the Passion Play. But we were so disappointed that we didn't see the Play."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Miss Ainger eagerly, "isn't it a lovely village! And did Herr Steiner take you to Garmisch? No? What a pity! Garmisch is such a precious place, with those great pines. Oh, David, and the Rote Hirsch where I stayed—"

Instantly she stopped short, and caught her breath. She glanced at Robert—a swift, fleeting look, a spark of fear. It came involuntarily, and died in a flash. Robert was keenly alert, but he gave no sign that he noticed. Miss Ainger *had* been in Germany, then; yet her credentials denied it. Why had she lied?

Tea was over. David excused himself, went out into the garden with Tannhäuser; and later went upstairs to unpack.

Miss Ainger said, "John, I'm very happy, being near to you every day in the Room."

She was rather lovely with her rich cornelian hair and her green eyes; and her voice was pleasantly soft. She expressed not the slightest recognition that he was not John. Was all this part of her box of tricks? "We haven't seen much of each other of late," she continued, "but I've never forgotten, John!"

ROBERT felt her deep sentiment, and knew it was real, intense. But it was not for him; it was for John, who was now gone. . . . He remembered the summer days at Cookham, when Miss Ainger had run down from London in her pale blue roadster; there had been luncheons and teas and dinners under the river trees, in the checkered sunlight; and robins and thrushes had flashed across the long golden lawn that swept down to the river's edge. Blue summer days lazing the hours away in a leisurely gliding punt, John swinging the craft upstream, the woman who loved him basking under a shimmering green parasol, and himself, Robert, in a bathing-suit, drinking in the sun in the bow.

He had instantly been attracted by Sudan; her beauty and gentle charm in John's presence was paradoxically combined with brittle smartness and a gallant insouciance in the company of other men. And she could talk brilliantly. Her work in Egypt as assistant to Lord Attleboro always fascinated; she could speak French and Arabic with the native accents; and here at home she attended the first nights of plays, and operas, and the ballet; and never missed the season at Cowes.

His emotions now were clear and unconfused. There was this suspicion, and Miss Ainger herself had added to it. "Why has she lied?" he asked himself again. It seemed incredible. But she had been aware of it, and yet she was unaware of its impact upon him. Her voice now had dropped its brittleness; she reposed with a soft loveliness, a tender surrender, as she spoke. "*We haven't seen much of each other of late, but I've never forgotten.*"

Robert said: "I'd be pleased if you would dine with me tonight, Sudan."

She came alive with a happy start; her eyes shone like stars. "I'd love to, John," she said.

"There's a little restaurant in Greek Street, an odd atmospheric place known as the Dalmatian Peasant," Robert said. "Have you ever been there?"

Miss Ainger faltered. For just a second she paused, perplexed. "No, I don't think so," she answered with directness.

"Well, shall we go along at eight?"

"Love to!" Then suddenly: "Oh, wait! Oh, John. I can't go tonight. I've just remembered. I have an engagement—it's Lady Hulgrave's party on the houseboat *Amelia*. Do you mind, John?"

"Yes, I do mind," smiled Robert Usher. "I very much wanted to spend this evening with you, Sudan. But it's all right. I understand. We'll meet again very soon."

THE police river launch slipped silently through the darkness down the Thames and eased to a dead stop under an umbrella of willows across stream from the houseboat *Amelia*, from which came the pleasant sounds of music and laughter and dancing.

Unseen and unsuspected, Robert Usher, aboard the launch, focused binoculars upon the houseboat.

The *Amelia* was a beautiful river craft, long and low and gayly painted in white and yellow, with orange awnings and strings of gay little flags; and all its windows and portholes were blacked out, which gave it a sense of romance and mystery as it lay here in the somber shadow of the Thames.

After a little while the front doors were thrown wide for a brief moment, and within, in the spacious saloon, men and women were glimpsed dancing and drinking; and occasionally a couple would stroll out onto the deck to lean against the rail and gaze at the river.

The night was calmly silent; the clean halfworld of stars blazed blue-white overhead, and a vagrant breeze swept the willows.

To starboard of the houseboat, Usher, through the glasses, made out the outlines of a private launch, its painter tied to the rail of the *Amelia*.

"That's Fritz Kobeler's launch," said Usher to Inspector Chambers of the Yard, beside him. "Kobeler is a naturalized German, and that gives him his freedom. But the Intelligence has reason to believe he's a Nazi agent. We've been watching him for days. The young woman I'm shadowing is also on that houseboat. . . . Look! There she is now."

Usher and the Yard man saw at that moment the doors swing inward and in the sudden blaze of light Miss Ainger strolled out of the saloon in the company of a tall, blond man, lithely built, with good shoulders and appropriately narrow hips. They moved leisurely down to the rail of the deck. The door behind them closed again; they were now in semi-darkness. Only through the binoculars could their features be distinguished at this distance; Usher observed them closely.

"By God, she's with Kobeler!" he exclaimed suddenly in a low whisper.

The realization came to him with a shock. He held the glasses hard on the man. It was difficult to believe what he saw. It seemed impossible that Sudan Ainger could be here in the close personal company of this man. Could it mean a chance meeting? A planned rendezvous? Collaboration? Usher's nerves crisped as he watched them. Had the thing that he feared come to pass? . . . And now for the first time he experienced regret. Fear and regret. Above all things he did not want to believe—

His mind was agilely fitting the pieces together: Sudan's off-guard admission that she had been in Germany. That was only incriminating in view of her sworn statement in her credentials that she had never been in Germany. Her swift recognition that she had made a dangerous slip. Her eager acceptance of his dinner invitation, and her quick refusal when she discovered that they were going to the Dalmatian Peasant. And now—her presence here in intimate association with a man who had been admitted to the best homes in London, who was presumably pro-British, but who was marked as an enemy agent.

Through the glasses Usher studied them with nerves taut; they were close together and chatting intimately; then they moved toward the end of the deck in the direction of the launch. Kobeler helped Sudan down into the launch. A moment later the German was at the

wheel. The engine rasped in a series of subdued explosions, and the launch pulled out slowly into midstream, and set a course down-river toward the estuary.

Usher waited until the launch had disappeared from view half a mile downstream around a bend; then he gave the order to follow.

The police boat maintained its half-mile distance for many miles. As the Kobeler launch quickened speed, the police boat kept pace. They had long since sped under the great bridges, under the black masses of vaulted stone towering gloomy and ominous, had swept past Greenwich, past Blackwall Reach, and were heading toward the wide reaches of the Thames. Darkened warehouses lay on the banks, and docks, and giant cranes. Strings of barges plied silently past, up-river. The two launches shot past the ghost of a clipper, into a vista of lagoons, quays, funnels and masts of ships.

The Yard men stood ready for emergencies. One man was at the searchlight, ready to flash on.

By now the two boats were well into the wide dark lower reaches of the estuary, and the Nazi launch, which was really a speedboat, plunged ahead at top speed, cutting the stream with prodigious walls of foam. Suddenly it circled, veering off to port. It decreased speed.

"What's he up to now?" called Inspector Chambers to Usher, who was peering through the binoculars.

"God knows!" answered Usher. "He's not going back." Then with sudden outburst: "Look off there to the left! A submarine!"

Chambers looked and saw, faintly distinguishable in the gloom the superstructure and periscope of the U-boat projected above the water line.

"A Nazi sub!" exclaimed Usher. "He's come out to meet it." Then turning, he shouted to the man at the searchlight: "Flood her! Pick up the speedboat."

A second later the brilliant white streak of the searchlight cut across the murky water and flooded the racing launch with its merciless glare. The launch was just completing its gigantic encirclement. The searchlight was a surprising shock to it; and the next second it picked up speed and raced off to starboard. As it swung past, less than two hundred yards away, Usher saw, through the glasses, the figure of Kobeler at the wheel, and Miss Ainger beside him. Her whole appearance was one of terror. She half-sat, half-knelt, in the cockpit; she clutched at Kobeler's arm and was crying out to him; and the wind swept back her hair wildly from her pale, terror-stricken face.

"Full speed!" shouted Usher. "Follow the boat."

The police craft shot ahead, flinging up spray, with the searchlight full upon the fleeing launch.

At the same moment Usher saw the submarine submerge—crash-dive out of sight.

IT was impossible for the police to attack the U-boat with any success; the Admiralty, however, would be immediately notified, and a flotilla of sub-chasers out of Sheerness would stalk it.

The amazing episode now resolved itself into a wild race in which the police boat swiftly drew closer to the Nazi. A hundred feet now separated them. Usher stood in the stern and shouted through a megaphone: "Stop! Stop!" For answer, the tall figure of Kobeler was seen to stand up in the boat and fire a succession of shots at his pursuers. The bullets whined past, and Usher dropped instantly to a level with the gunwale.

"Let him have it!" Usher called to the Yard men. "Be careful of the woman."

The Yard men fired. Kobeler was seen to sway. He dropped beside Miss Ainger and held her as a shield against the police fire.

"Just about what we could expect," Usher called to Chambers. "Stop the firing!"

The police boat drew alongside. Kobeler arose, lurched forward, and the next second he toppled over into the surging river. Miss Ainger, frantic, seized the wheel and fumbled with the mechanism in an effort to stop the boat. Before she could succeed, the police boat brushed the gunwale of the other, and Usher leaped aboard beside her and cut off the engine. The launch slowed and drifted.

Usher shouted back to the Scotland Yard Inspector: "Radio the Admiralty the location of the sub, then see if you can pick up Kobeler. I'll run back to Tilbury."

As Miss Ainger recognized Usher, she cried: "John! Oh, John! Oh, it is you—"

Starting the engine again, Usher swung the boat about and headed in the direction of Tilbury Docks.

Behind him, the police boat began its search for the body of the Nazi agent. The searchlight slashed in vivid white streaks over the dank expanse of water.

Usher, at the wheel, felt the trembling body of Miss Ainger beside him. She was wet, and chilled through, and suffering from shock. Her arms clutched his arm convulsively, and her breathing came in choking gasps.

"Here, let me give you my coat," said Usher.

He removed his overcoat and placed it around her slender shoulders. She remained huddled in the warm coat, silent, and closely clinging to him as he drove the boat swiftly toward shore and ran in along a concrete landing wall at the dock. A boatman made the launch fast. Usher helped Miss Ainger up a pair of dark stone steps. They followed the flagstones into the boat-house where a welcome bright coal fire was burning.

"We'll wait here till the police arrive," said Usher. "Better come close to the fire; it will dry you out. Now perhaps," he said,—his voice was friendly,—"you'll tell me what you were doing with Fritz Kobeler in that boat."

"I don't know! I don't know what happened—or where he was taking me."

"Perhaps I can help you," said Usher quietly. "He was taking you out to an enemy submarine that had nosed its way into the estuary. Didn't you see its periscope?"

"No, I did not," answered Miss Ainger emphatically.

"In another ten minutes or so you'd have been on board. Why?"

"John, you must believe me," she pleaded. Her eyes were pitifully starred with tears. She leaned toward him and spoke with soft fervency. "I did not know we were going to a submarine. What submarine? He said nothing about it. . . . After I left you, I came on here to Lady Hulgrave's party. There were a number of people that I knew there, and I met Mr. Kobeler. He seemed an agreeable sort of person, and I danced with him. He asked me to go for a run on the river in his new speedboat. I never dreamed this would happen. The first I knew that anything was wrong was when the police turned that searchlight on us and Mr. Kobeler fired at their boat."

"And came within a hair of hitting me," added Usher.

"Oh, I'm sorry, John."

"Didn't you know, or suspect, that Kobeler was a Nazi agent?"

"Of course I didn't! How could I know that?" Her eyes were wide and frank, and her voice rang with indignation. "And why should I suspect anything wrong when Lady Hulgrave sponsored him? Why, Fritz Kobeler has been accepted in Belgravia and Queen Anne's Gate."

Robert Usher was silent a moment; then he said, searchingly: "There's one thing I must know, Sudan. Be very careful how you answer," he warned. "Have you ever seen or met Fritz Kobeler before?"

She answered instantly: "No, John, never. Never before tonight."

Outside, noises arose from the dock. The boatman was mooring the police boat.

A moment later the door was flung open and the three Scotland Yard men came in with Kobeler.

The prisoner was drenched and bedraggled; his arm, hit by a police bullet, hung in a sling made from his white scarf.

"We fished him out," said Inspector Chambers. "I've cautioned him that anything he says may be used against him."

Miss Ainger had risen before the fire the moment Kobeler entered. She stared at him, white-lipped.

Usher went over to him and said: "I'm arresting you for espionage, Kobeler. You'll be taken to the Yard by Inspector Chambers here, and questioned."

Kobeler's lips curled in contempt. He glanced across at Miss Ainger standing before the fire in Usher's long overcoat. "I suppose I have you to thank for this, Miss Ainger?" he said in his suave drawing-room manner.

"I had nothing to do with your arrest," she replied.

Usher said: "You knew there was a German submarine in the estuary."

"Was there?" smiled Kobeler coolly.

"Why were you taking Miss Ainger out to it?"

"I bet Miss Ainger my boat could do fifty. If there happened to be a sub knocking around, why connect me with it?"

"All right, Kobeler," returned Usher. "But as you'd never met Miss Ainger before tonight, why did you involve her?"

Kobeler laughed. "Is that her story?" he asked.

"That's the fact," broke in Miss Ainger. Her face was white and purposeful.

Kobeler's laughter dwindled to an amused chuckle.

"Oh, well, if that's the way of it—"

"But you know it's true!" insisted Miss Ainger. She moved over and faced him squarely.

"Is it?" said Kobeler. "You forget very readily, don't you? I thought our little dinner last week was a pleasant affair. But maybe you prefer to forget."

Usher heard Miss Ainger's audible gasp. She made a convulsive movement as if to slap her accuser across the face, but she powerfully restrained it. Usher asked: "Where did you dine with Miss Ainger?"

Kobeler hesitated a second; his eyes glanced from Miss Ainger to the police waiting to take him along, then back to Usher. "The Dalmatian Peasant," he answered. "Do you remember now, Miss Ainger?"

There was a stark silence; no one spoke for a second or two; then with a gesture Usher directed the Yard men to take Kobeler along. The German went out quietly, holding his head at an insolent angle.

"This is one reason why I hate the Germans," Miss Ainger said bitterly. "I hate them all!"

"We'll go along now," said Robert Usher. "I'll call a taxi and take you home."

CHAPTER NINE

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MISSING FINGER

ROYLOTT BEVAN arrived at the house in Lancaster Gate at a quarter to nine. He rang the doorbell and was admitted by the housekeeper Libby. "Ah, good evening, Libby," said he. "Is Mr. Usher in, and ready to be beaten at chess tonight?"

"Mr. Usher went out two hours ago," replied Libby.

"But you expect him back shortly?"

"No, he said he might be late getting home."

"But, Libby, this is our night for chess!"

"I don't know, sir; he didn't mention that you were coming or anything about chess."

"But good Lord, Libby, he knows I always come on this night. Has anything happened to keep him away?"

"I don't know, sir. He's been a bit worried the last two days, I could see that; and he's been absent-minded about the house. Not quite himself, if you can understand?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said Bevan. "Unless worrying about David upset him a bit. But David's home and quite happy, isn't he?"

"Yes; there's nothing to worry about David. He seemed pleased enough to be home again."

"Well, if you don't mind I think I'll wait for him, Libby."

"Of course, Mr. Bevan. There's whisky and soda, and the Harry Lauder records. Just make yourself at home."

"Thank you, Libby. I'll do that."

Bevan removed his coat and went into the living-room. It was a spacious room, with a bright fire blazing. Libby poured some more coal nuts on, out of the brass container, and then went out. Bevan helped himself generously to a whisky out of the decanter. Then he went over to the cabinet gramophone, selected a series of his favorite Lauder records, and put them on. "Roamin' in the Gloamin'" rang softly through the room; and Bevan, mellowed by the Scotch, and humming the old song in tune with the record, prepared for a pleasant evening. Tannhäuser, attracted by the music, came trotting in.

Bevan knew where John Usher kept the chess set. "Might as well make ready for battle," he said to himself. He went over to the Sheraton desk, opened the lower drawer, and took out the board and the box of pieces. He laid the board on a table, and slowly arranged the various ivory pieces. When they were perfectly set, he stood looking down at them, and gave his head a sharp nod. "By Jove, I shall beat him tonight," he said. "Yes, Tannhäuser, you stick around and watch me trim your master! He's beaten me three times running, but this is my night to howl!"

USHER was aware of the thousand and one subtle dangers that faced him in his masquerade. At the moment he assumed his dead brother's personality his mind had shrewdly surveyed the chances against him. But there were favoring circumstances also; the most potent of these was *time*. He would act quickly; within forty-eight hours he would know his brother's murderer; within that period there was slight chance of detection.

And then he was favored by personal characteristics and mannerisms. His appearance, his features, were identical; it seemed almost as if fate had set the stage for him to avenge John's death and protect the secret and important work of Room 40. His voice, too, was mannered and identical: a well-modulated, cultured voice with a mild Oxford accent, deep, subdued, and humanly warm. He might have been an actor on the West End stage with this voice; certainly he had the physical magnetism of an actor. His walk had the same quick manly stride as John's; he had a trick of tossing his head alertly when anyone spoke to him, and a power of deep concentration. He was a good listener. His laugh was pleasant and infectious. That was the credit side.

But there were pitfalls. There was the matter of *knowledge and information*. David had sensed that he was Robert; he had expected that. But thus far he had successfully deceived Libby. He had considered taking her into his confidence, but had decided that Libby would prove a challenge to him; if he could deceive her, he could certainly emerge safely from his contacts with Miss Ainger and the cryptographers in the Room. But he knew he must watch his utterances. His views on politics differed violently from John's. John had turned Catho-

lic; he was orthodox Church of England. John's pastime was cricket; he had no use for the game. John loved the companionship of women, and was in love with Sudan Ainger. He, himself, had been singularly attracted to Miss Ainger; he knew the danger of that relationship. A woman's intuition is more sensitive than a man's; her instinct is virtually unfailing. If he were detected, Miss Ainger would be the first to suspect.

Then there were the *acquired characteristics*, which widely differentiated him from John. John had no sense of music; he, Robert, was passionately fond of music: the Promenade Concerts, the opera, and the ballet. He played the piano with rare distinction. John was a lover of fine wines and exquisite foods, and dined at the Savoy and Quaglino's and Boulestan's. Robert loved to prowl through Soho; he knew every French, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Russian hole-in-the-wall in that strange, colorful foreign quarter. And chess. Many an evening he had been bored stiff watching John and Roylott Bevan burning up their mental energies in the game. John had tried to teach him, Robert, the fine points. But he had quickly abandoned it. He preferred to settle comfortably on the couch by the fire and lose himself in Aldous Huxley. . . .

It was near midnight when Robert came in and found Bevan waiting.

"John, you old blighter!" Bevan greeted him. "Where the devil have you been? I came over for our game and I've been waiting for hours."

"Oh, hello, Bevan! So sorry. But I had some important work to do."

"You might have left a note, or word with Libby."

"I know, I'm an old boulder. But I see Libby's fixed you up with the Scotch, and you've had an evening with Harry Lauder, so maybe you'll forgive me."

"Forgive you? I'm going to beat you tonight."

Chess! Oh, yes, John and Bevan and chess. It was an institution. Here was a snag. Robert was such a rotten player. If he could put Bevan off—

"Isn't it rather late, old cock? Five past twelve. By the time we finish—"

"Sweet Fanny Adams!" ejaculated Bevan. "Do you think I've waited all this time to wish you pleasant dreams? . . . See, I've set the board. Come on—you can open."

Bevan was a crafty player. As soon as the game started, Usher regretted it. Bevan advanced two pawns and brought out his bishop. The two knights swiftly became a menace. Once Robert Usher had seen John checkmate his opponent in six moves. Was this, now, Bevan's objective? Better to have insisted upon his excuse. And he must be careful, damned careful, of his little finger. Keep it curled under. . . . Usher thought: A man can read his opponent's entire mind and character in a game of chess. It was one thing to associate with Bevan in the Room, but quite another here in the intimacy of home. Any one of a score of trifles might lead to betrayal. For instance, the dog—

Hardly had the game proceeded seven minutes when the police dog, having shifted to a position under the Chinese lacquer cabinet, set up a dismal howl. "Quiet, Tannhäuser!" Usher commanded.

BEVAN lit his pipe and studied the dog. Again the animal emitted his piteous lament for his lost master. You could fool a man, but not a dog. Usher got up and went over to him. "What's the matter, old fellow?" he said, and reached out to stroke his head. Tannhäuser rejected the gesture and slunk away. Usher followed and repeated his friendly overture. Suddenly the dog gave a low growl, and snapped at his hand.

"That's strange," said Bevan. "He always lies beside your chair when we're playing."

"Come here, Tannhäuser!" urged Usher. But he refused to move, and Usher went back to the game.

"Check!"

And a moment later, "Mate!"

"You've got me," smiled Usher, wearily.

"You played a rotten game tonight, John. That king move—atrocious. What's happened to your technique?"

"I'll show you the next time we play," said Usher challengingly. He scooped the ivories into the black box. As he did so, Bevan's eyes centered, casually, for a fleeting half-second, upon his deft, active hands. He paused, with his glass halfway to his lips; then, in silence, he set the glass down. An exclamation, half uttered, died on his lips. At that moment Tannhäuser repeated his grieving, sorrowful cry. Bevan looked pointedly at the dog. Then he got up, saying, "You're tired out, John. I'd better toddle along. See you tomorrow morning in the Room."

After Bevan left, Usher went back to the dog. He lay with his fine head between his forepaws, his eyes half-open and filled with a deep melancholy. Usher knelt down looked into those sad eyes. "Yes, old fellow," he said, "I think I know how you feel."

IN the morning Bevan related the curious incidents of the night to Waterlow. Usher had arrived early and was in conference with Sir Christopher in the head's private office.

"First there was the dog," said Bevan. "Something's happened to that dog. He wouldn't go near John, and he lay under the desk and grieved. When John tried to pet him he snapped at him. Never saw him do that before. Tannhäuser is a one-man dog, and John is that man. . . . Then John played an atrocious game of chess. He almost always beats me, but last night he made the most astonishing moves, and I mated him in seven plays. . . . Then his little finger. Have you ever noticed, on his left hand? He lost it when we were shooting in Scotland a few years ago. Inspector Chambers mentioned it that day we were fingerprinted." The Scotsman leaned close to Waterlow; he spoke in a whisper. "Well, last night, by gad, when he raked the pieces into the box I saw—" He held up his own little finger. "It was as perfect as mine!"

Waterlow listened with an aroused curiosity. "But a man's amputated finger never grows again. Surely—some mistake—"

"No mistake!" echoed Bevan. "I've seen that left hand a hundred times. There's something damn' wrong somewhere, and I can't figure it."

Waterlow drummed with his fingers on his desk. "Well, if you look again," he began; then, "See here, I'll have a look. The evidence of two just men, you know."

"And you'll see a perfect finger," said Bevan, earnestly. "He's in there with Sir Christopher now. Watch carefully when he comes out."

In the private office Robert was telling the story of his night's adventure to the head of the Room. Sir Christopher listened with unconcealed amazement. Miss Ainger was not in the Room today. "Because," explained Usher, "she was suffering from shock, and I advised her to stay home and rest."

"But it isn't possible," said Sir Christopher, "that Miss Ainger could be the one who killed your brother."

"I am only too ready to agree with you on that," urged Usher. "But how do you explain the fact that she swore that she had never been in Germany; yet admitted it to me? That she accepted my invitation to dinner, then refused it when she learned that I would take her to the Dalmatian Peasant? That she spent the evening in the company of the Nazi agent, was speeding with him toward the submarine, and finally that Kobeler asserted pointblank that he had dined with her at Josef's place?"

Sir Christopher was silently thoughtful.

"I know what you're thinking," said Usher, breaking the silence. "I can tell you it would be a tragic moment if in the end I find that she is in any way guilty."

"Yes, I can understand that," said Sir Christopher. "And now what about Cope?"

Usher's reply startled the head.

"I have found out," he answered, "that Cope has dinner once a week, usually Thursday or Friday, at the Peasant."

"Is that a coincidence, or do you suspect that Cope—"

"That I shall find out tonight," replied Usher. "Because Cope will be my dinner guest at the Peasant—unless, of course, like Miss Ainger, he thinks better of it and slips out of it. I may have news for you later in the evening. Will you be at home?"

"I'll make it a point to be at home," replied Sir Christopher. "I'll be waiting anxiously to hear from you."

A moment later the door opened, and Usher came out into the Room.

The eyes of both Bevan and Waterlow followed him from where they stood at the big blackboard. Each man glanced at the other with sharp surprise. Usher's left hand was bound in a tight white linen bandage and he held it against his body as he crossed the Room and sat at his desk.

There was no chance now for Waterlow to observe his little finger. But now the man's loyalty and high sense of duty was aroused. He said to Bevan: "Don't be bluffed. Go in to Sir Christopher and tell him your suspicions."

Bevan hesitated. "But if I'm wrong I should feel such a fool."

"Bosh!" ejaculated Waterlow.

"Besides, Usher is such a close friend."

"Then I'll go," Waterlow asserted vigorously. "This department is too vital to the country's safety to let the smallest suspicion pass. I'll explain to Sir Christopher and let him be the judge." And he started resolutely for the private office.

Sir Christopher listened patiently as Waterlow relayed the odd happenings of the previous night.

"If you could examine his left hand you could assure yourself positively if he is John Usher or some impostor masquerading as John Usher and trying to learn the secrets of the Room," declared Waterlow.

He leaned far across the desk as he spoke, his face bright with excitement, his little sad eyes afire. A great inner agitation seemed to grip him. "If he should be an impostor it means grave disaster to the country," he warned.

Sir Christopher smiled across at him.

"My dear Waterlow," he answered. "I'm glad you reported this. I agree, we can't be too careful, and you have shown conscience and loyalty. But I happen to know that Bevan is mistaken. I've seen Usher's hand, and the first joint of his little finger is missing. His dog has been acting strangely the last few days, and this morning he bit his hand. Usher had it treated and dressed."

He rose behind his desk to dismiss Waterlow.

"Explain this to Bevan, but I wouldn't mention the matter to Usher if I were you. Thank you, Waterlow, and please thank Bevan for me. And always feel free to report the slightest suspicious circumstance. Better be mistaken than caught off-guard. No disasters!"

As Waterlow opened the door to go out—

"Oh, Waterlow—"

"Yes, Sir Christopher?"

"Just a minute. Sit down, won't you? While you are here, there's something I'd like to say to you."

Waterlow reseated himself and faced Sir Christopher across the desk. His expression was puzzled: he awaited Sir Christopher's words eagerly.

There was a brief pause as the head gazed out of the window, at the misty blue vista of Trafalgar Square. The sun was breaking through, and a myriad pigeons fluttered white and gray and bluish at the base of the tall Nelson column.

"I had a talk with Sir Reginald Meade in the Admiralty yesterday." He turned back and faced Waterlow. "Sir Reginald expects a long war—five to seven years. He believes the whole naval outcome depends on our work in reading the enemy's codes. Naturally the future of this department concerns him gravely."

What was Sir Christopher getting at? Waterlow waited, his nimble mind seeking to fathom what was coming. When he heard, it both pleased him and surprised him.

"If anything should happen to me," went on Sir Christopher, "it is Sir Reginald's wish that you become the head of Room 40."

"But it isn't likely—" stammered Waterlow; and then he said in modest protest: "Usher—"

"I said," repeated Sir Christopher, "that it is Sir Reginald's wish. It seems Sir Reginald knows intimately your fascinating deciphering of the Khoi and Hamadan tablets, and as he is on the board of the British Museum, that evidently sways him. In any event I thought it as well that you know. It can only tighten the *esprit de corps*—"

"Thank you," said Waterlow. "I am naturally flattered that my work is appreciated. But I am not ambitious—"

"Tut-tut!" clucked Sir Christopher. "Man is an ambitious animal, whether he knows it or not."

"But God forbid," protested Waterlow, "that anything—"

Sir Christopher cut him short with a shrewd, good-humored grin. "Come of it what may, as Sinon said," said he. . . . Phædrus! Waterlow thought he understood.

CHAPTER TEN

THE ADVENTURE OF THE VANISHING WAITER



JOSEF, the suave and smiling, the deeply secretive and crafty, stood beside the table of the two Englishmen and guided them in their selection of a rich Continental dinner. It was clearly evident to Robert Usher that Mortimer Cope was perfectly at home here. "Well, good evening Josef," he had greeted the amiable little proprietor.

"Good evening, sir," Josef had replied. "Will the gentleman accept cocktails with my compliments?"

The cocktails were strong and tangy when they came, and Usher sipped his slowly.

He speculated about Josef. Did Josef know of the murder in the Code Room? Did he know who he, Robert, was? Did he know of the shift that had placed him, Robert, in his brother's shoes? Did he know Mortimer Cope as a spy, or was the relationship what it appeared to be, that of host and guest in this unique foreign restaurant in the heart of London's foreign quarter?

The restaurant was crowded. Artists and authors and foreign-looking men and women filled the tables. They liked the intimate, Bohemian flavor; and the little lamps on the tables reflected upward on the vivid murals portraying lush green meadows, and cerulean lakes, and glistening white mountains, and peasants in multi-colored costumes. The waiters, Usher noted, were foreign, middle and southern European, and their foreign accents mingled with the hum of conversation.

Cope, outside the Room, was an interesting cove. An old Oxonian, he was a friend of the Prime Minister and

knew most of the cabinet ministers; and he had an uncanny instinct in judging the status of the big-wigs; he predicted those destined for the high positions and those whose heads were due to be chopped off. He kept referring to Usher as "J. U." and it was apparent that he had no inkling of the tragedy of the Room, judging by the artless flow of his conversation. But of course, Usher argued, if there were guilt in his soul his chatter would be precisely as it was; and by no token would he let it be known that he was conscious that his host was not "J. U." himself.

It was now just on nine o'clock. The life of the little café was at its liveliest. A waiter wheeled up a wagon containing the *hors d'œuvres*.

"You must have some of Josef's *pâté de foie gras*," said Cope. "It's especially flown twice a week from Zagreb, and you eat it with that heavy dark rye bread."

The two men ordered the *pâté*. Usher smiled to himself. Almost the same words with which he had urged the famous *pâté* upon Morgan. The wine-waiter came and offered the wine-card.

Usher immediately became engrossed in the names of the wines. John had been a lover of fine wines, but Robert was no connoisseur, and the vintages puzzled him.

Engrossed in the mysteries of the wine-card, Usher did not see one particular waiter standing in the rear doorway, that led to the kitchen, and beckoning surreptitiously to Cope. Remembering back afterward, Usher recalled only that Cope rose suddenly without any explanation, and said tersely, "I'll be back in a minute," and moved toward the kitchen end of the restaurant and disappeared through the swinging doors leading to the anterooms. Usher never saw the waiter at any time; he seemed to appear and disappear like a wraith.

Fifteen minutes passed.

Usher was enjoying the *pâté* and the rich rye bread. But he had the feeling that by now Cope should be back. Ten minutes later he became anxious. He called Josef over to his table.

"What has become of my friend?" he asked. "He disappeared out the back."

Instantly he detected an impersonal, subtly cabalistic, manner in the little proprietor.

"Probably telephoning," said Josef; and with a shrug, he moved away.

A few minutes later, "Damn it, I think something's happened," said Usher to himself. He dropped his serviette to the table, got up and made his way to the rear. He passed through the swinging doors. He looked about. The kitchen was a hive of waiters and cooks weaving about frantically. He glanced into the Men's Room. It was empty. The office was on the right, with the telephone. It, too, was empty. No sign of Cope. He stopped a waiter *en route* past him with a tray of dishes.

"Where is that Englishman who came through here half an hour ago?" he demanded.

In a heavy guttural the waiter answered, "*Nein, nein*, I don't see him," and was gone.

Usher became curious, angry, alarmed. He returned to the restaurant and demanded of Josef what had become of Cope.

"I cannot find him anywhere on the premises," said Usher.

Again Josef shrugged his shoulders, and smiled impersonally. "Oh, he will be back," he said, indifferently. "Did you enjoy the *pâté*?"

Usher's brain telegraphed his next move. He dropped his anxious manner and smiled appreciatively. "Very good," he said. "Look here, I have an important engagement and cannot delay. When my friend returns, please tell him that I have gone on."

He called for the bill, paid it, with a two-shilling tip for the waiter, and departed.

Greek Street was blacked out, and he walked into Soho Square, looking for a cab.

The disappearance of Cope was a matter that must be reported to Sir Christopher at once. The man was gone—vanished; and there was no doubt about it. Positively he was nowhere in that restaurant. But he was somewhere. And if Josef knew, he was trying to stall until Cope could return. Or perhaps Josef didn't know; and Cope had gone off on his own. At the moment Usher felt baffled, outwitted, and he was filled with an upsurge of anger.

There wasn't a cab in sight. That further irritated him; but a moment later he hailed a wheezy old one in Oxford Street and ordered the driver to set him down in Portland Place.

Presently the cab rolled up in the darkness before the gray stone house that was Sir Christopher's home. Usher paid the driver who said, "Thank you, sir," then settled on his seat and started to light a cigarette.

USHER hurried up the steps of the house. He had hardly gone halfway when the front door opened and he saw Cope rushing out, hatless, his face white and tortured, his lips twitching. As the two men met midway, Cope suddenly stopped dead, for just a fleeting second, pointed back toward the house, and Usher heard a snatch of sound come from his lips—a sharp, painful, indistinguishable sound. Then Cope hurried on down to the pavement. The taxi was just pulling away. He hailed it by a wild gesture of his arm, leaped in, and the cab swung rapidly around the corner into the night.

As the cab vanished, Usher hurried quickly to the front door and rang the bell. Seconds passed, and he pressed the bell a second time. The door was opened by Sir Christopher's butler, a man with the lugubrious face of a church verger; it now was tense and white.

"Can I see Sir Christopher at once?" said Usher sharply.

In the light of the hall the butler recognized Mr. Usher. "Oh, yes, Mr. Usher. You'd better come!" he said urgently.

Usher followed him across the hall, through the big silent drawing-room, in the direction of the library. The rooms were dimly lit, and all the blackout curtains were drawn across the windows. The butler opened the double doors to the library and Usher started to enter. Suddenly he stopped dead, and fell into a cold sweat.

Sir Christopher was lying fallen across his desk. There was a knife through his heart, and the blood had trailed across the mahogany like a crimson arrow.

Usher gazed at the poor, staring, white face for fully a minute. Then, it being more than he could bear, he asked Stanton, the butler, to bring a tablecloth to cover it. As he did this, Usher asked, "Where is Lady Pelt?"

"She wasn't well and her sister took her down to Haslemere for a few days."

Usher turned to the telephone. The one man in all the world who shared his momentous secret was dead, cruelly and brutally struck down, in all probability by the same hand that had killed his brother John. For reasons of state John's death had been kept secret; but it would be well nigh impossible to conceal Sir Christopher's tragedy, it having occurred in his home, with knowledge of the servants, and with Cope vitally involved. The first step must be to notify Scotland Yard. But when he seized the telephone he saw that the wires had been cut. All communication with the city outside was shut off. Stanton explained:

"Mr. Cope tried to telephone, sir, but the wires were broken."

Usher was instantly alert.

"What was Mr. Cope doing here? Was he in the library when this happened?"

"He arrived about ten minutes ago," answered the butler. "When I opened the door to him he was very agitated, and without coat and hat, and he said he must see Sir Christopher at once—that it was terribly important. Sir Christopher had been working in here after dinner, and I was about to inform him of Mr. Cope's message when I heard voices. I didn't know he had a visitor. I asked Mr. Cope to wait, and I made it clear that Sir Christopher never liked to be disturbed when he had visitors—it was a hard rule with him, sir. Well, I left Mr. Cope in the drawing-room for a moment, and I had gone into the service quarters, when I heard a loud and awful calling of my name; when I rushed back there was Mr. Cope hurrying out of the library, with the doors wide open, and I saw what you just saw. 'Sir Christopher has just been killed!' he cried. He was aghast, sir; and he went back and tried to telephone. When he found the wires were cut he didn't wait but rushed out of the house, and I think that you must have met him, sir."

"But whose voice did you hear while Mr. Cope was waiting?"

"I couldn't tell, sir; I really don't know. I never saw the man come or go."

Usher made a swift examination of the room: the positions of desk, table, big chairs, bookcases, and windows and doors. He stopped short at the French windows. "Look here, Stanton, this door is open," he said. "Do you know if it was open immediately after dinner?"

"No, sir, it was closed; I'm certain, sir."

"Then the man whose voice you heard may have come in this way," said Usher.

The doorbell rang. Stanton responded, and a minute later Cope, still hatless and coatless, entered with Inspector Chambers and two men from the Yard.

Cope, fumbling his words in his nervous terror, related in detail what had happened; and he disclosed the body of the dead Government official to the Inspector.

Usher stated that he had come to see Sir Christopher on a secret matter immediately after the crime was committed. One of the Yard men set up a camera and photographed the body. The Inspector examined the severed telephone wires, and turned his attention to the French windows, studying the floor and the outside stone terrace.

Usher moved into the entrance hall with Cope. "For God's sake, what happened in the restaurant?" he asked.

COPE'S story was a curious one:

In the rear doorway, he told Usher, he had seen a young English waiter who had beckoned him; he had joined this waiter in the kitchen. The man was trying to conceal his agitation before the other waiters. "You're Mr. Cope, aren't you?" he had said. "Do you know that Sir Christopher Pelt is in grave danger—may even be dead now? Please go at once to his home and warn him! It's worth my life to interfere." The next moment he had urged Cope out into the alley behind the restaurant where he had hurried to the end of the passage and picked up a taxi, luckily, that was just discharging a fare. He had arrived in time to hear Sir Christopher's death-cry; but when he entered the library, it was only to find that the murderer had accomplished his work and fled.

"Come back to the Peasant with me," insisted Usher. "We must find that waiter. He may be the key to this whole evil business."

As they emerged together into the dark chasm of Portland Place, a dank yellow fog had settled down upon London. They groped their way into Langham Place, hoping for a cab. None passed. They walked briskly. When they reached the restaurant they saw that their table was still vacant, and they resumed their seats.

Josef saw them enter. He came forward alertly. "Ah, you see your friend did return," he smiled to Usher.

"Josef," said Cope, taking pains to conceal his anxiety, "I want to speak to that English waiter—"

"English waiter?" said Josef in surprise; "but I have no English waiter."

"But you have, and I spoke to him before I left."

"Where?" exclaimed Josef. "I have never had an English waiter here. The English do not make good waiters. Look about! Do you see—"

Cope had already gazed sharply about the room. "No, I do not see him," said he.

"Of course not, because he was never here," smiled Josef; and Usher sensed the shade of imperiousness in his tone. "But satisfy yourself, sir," added Josef. "Go into the back—look there—you are welcome."

Usher rose at once, and Cope followed. Instantly the cold imperious smile on Josef's lips vanished. A look of contempt, of hate, took its place. The men had chosen not to believe him.

Usher and Cope passed on into the rear, studying each waiter, and even the cooks and dish-washers.

"Well?" said Usher.

Cope stopped one of the foreign waiters, a thin, bald-headed, beak-nosed Serbian.

"There was an English waiter here about an hour ago," said Cope. "A young man—about thirty. Where is he?"

The waiter shook his head dismally.

"Engleesh? No, never—never Engleesh!" he said emphatically.

The doors opened behind them and Josef came in. Again his emotional countenance had changed. He was now suavely amused. "Have you found your English waiter?" he asked.

"Damn't funny!" ejaculated Cope. "I'm positive he was here. Confound it, I talked with him! Don't you think I know my own countrymen?" His voice rose in nervous anger. "What have you done with him? Sent him away—or—or—" He paused. Suddenly he remembered the low, controlled voice that had uttered certain words of doom: "*It's worth my life to interfere.*"

Usher tightened his grip on his arm, warning him to silence. He returned Josef's complacent smile.

"Sorry, Josef. Just put it down as a comedy of errors. . . . Oh, I did enjoy the *pâté de foie gras*."

"Thank you," said Josef, bowing.

"And one day you'll see me back here again," added Usher.

"Very soon, I hope?"

"Very soon," promised Usher.

Cope collected his hat and coat, and the two men were presently lost in the black, fog-stricken London night.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WARNING

W

HEN the personnel of Room 40 read their morning newspapers on their way to the Admiralty Building, they were shocked to learn of the death of Sir Christopher Pelt. But the news had been cleverly contrived: the shrewd hand of Robert Usher was evident. There was the statement that Sir Christopher had been found dead by his butler, Stanton, at about nine forty-five on the previous evening, in his library; and as the French windows had been forced open, and the drawers of the desk had been ransacked, burglary was suspected and robbery the motive.

All of the news accounts connected Sir Christopher with the Admiralty; nowhere was the slightest mention made of Room 40.

And there was no hint of any spy suspect. That would have been fatal. The stories went on for a column to review Sir Christopher's distinguished career, and the

diplomatic posts he'd held in Rome, Moscow and Vienna, and the honors he'd won as a scientist and mathematician. It was all very impressive, all very tragic.

Usher entered the hushed Room. Miss Ainger went straight to him. As he removed his overcoat she saw his bandaged hand.

"John! What's happened?"

"Oh, nothing much. A little tussle with Tannhäuser. It's not as bad as it looks."

Then breathlessly, "Sir Christopher— How very terrible, John."

She saw that Usher's face was strained and tired.

"Yes," he replied, "it will be a vital loss to the Room."

MASON, Bevan and Hedley stood speaking low and earnestly as the door opened and Waterlow came in, accompanied by Sir Reginald Meade who had reorganized Room 40 when war had seemed inevitable and who was responsible for its work. Sir Reginald was a brusque, stoutish man with an iron-gray mustache and bushy eyebrows; his step was brisk and his manner electric with decision.

He came to an abrupt stop in the middle of the Room and faced the grave-visaged group of cryptographers.

"You all know what has happened," he said in short, clipped sentences. "We all regret it deeply; but in a time of war we cannot stop and ponder over yesterday. Enemy messages are pouring in every hour. You must carry on with your work. From today on Mr. Waterlow will be in charge. You will be responsible to him."

He turned sharply and entered the private office which Waterlow, as the head, would now occupy; and Waterlow went in with him and closed the door.

Usher sat down at his desk.

Inwardly the Intelligence official was tormented by a crucial question. Had Sir Christopher, before his death, confided to Sir Reginald Meade the tragedy of the Room, and that he, Robert, was masquerading as John until the sinister agent was caught? If so, then Sir Reginald would send for him now, within the next few minutes. But if Sir Reginald did not summon him, he must take the initiative and boldly confront the Admiralty official and the new head of the Room with the dramatic facts.

"John—"

Miss Ainger sat close to him at the desk. There was an intensity in her voice; her green eyes were shot with fire.

"Yes, Sudan?"

"Why Waterlow?" she asked, imperiously.

"Why not Waterlow?" returned Usher. "He's brilliant, with one of the cleverest minds in the country. An autocrat, perhaps, but the work requires an autocrat."

"But you are the genius of the Room, John."

Usher smiled with embarrassment.

"Genius is a very elastic word," he replied. "The spirit of the Room has always been team work, each of us giving his uttermost. Where one fails one day, another succeeds; and that is reversed the next day. Let us say, Sudan, that we are all good men, and we cheerfully give our full measure. Personally, I think Sir Reginald knows what he is doing. Waterlow has been in the British Museum for more than fifteen years; his decipherment of the Phocis stone was a masterpiece. Now if you're thinking in terms of genius, there's real genius for you."

After a pause Sudan Ainger said, "John, I'm not sure last night was burglary."

"Why do you say that, Sudan?"

"Well, it's just a feeling I have. And a certain conviction. The Nazis know how the work of the Room upset their naval and military plans in the last war. Do you think they've overlooked anything that will help them to win this war? Do you think they're so blind that they're going to let us function without a desperate effort to outwit us?"

"Naturally not. But how—"

"A spy."

"But the credentials of everyone in this room—including yourself—have been checked and rechecked."

"Of course. The Nazis would expect that. A spy would be prepared for it."

There was a question that Usher would like to ask her, but it would be dangerous. He reflected: How much did she know? What was her purpose in discussing this with him?

Suddenly she leaned forward, and her face was pale and graven with fear.

"I'm afraid, John," she said.

"Afraid of what?" he asked.

"Someone else may die."

He asked, startled that she should say this, "What do you mean? Who—"

"When the Nazis change the code again," she said.

"But who?"

"It would be the one who breaks down the cipher. He would be the one they would want killed."

The way she said it! Her tone carried a warning.

USHER was gazing fixedly at her, into the depths of her green eyes. He saw in them a look that he had never seen before—a flicker of bottomless anguish, the torture of a soul caught between two living walls of emotion. It was as if she knew of his brother's tragedy. As if some force were controlling and impelling her against her will. But her next words made his heart beat faster. "That might be you, John," she said, "and I would want to die if that had to happen."

If that had to happen. She had said it in that odd way. If he were the one who broke down the new, changed cipher, and if it had to happen, that he would die.

Suddenly behind them the door to the private office opened and Sir Reginald came out. Usher's gaze followed him as he crossed the Room with his abrupt, official stride. He saw no one; he spoke to no one; his impersonal gaze was straight ahead. He disappeared into the corridor outside.

Usher was now certain that Sir Reginald knew nothing. It would have been impossible, he was convinced, for this man to have left without calling him in, or glancing in his direction, had he been told the incredible facts. It followed that Waterlow could know nothing either. The moment had come for Usher to reveal himself.

He rose quickly from the desk, excused himself to Miss Ainger; the next moment he was knocking on the door to the private office.

"Come in," called Waterlow.

The British Museum man, baldish, bespectacled, and benevolent, looked up with a sharp intensity.

"Yes, Usher, what is it?"

Usher. But John or Robert? . . . Still, was it possible that he knew? Waterlow's back was to the window; the gray cloud of light hit upon Robert as he seated himself facing the other man. For a few dramatic seconds he did not speak; then, "I am not John Usher," he said.

Waterlow gave no sign; he seemed not to have grasped the contents of the amazing statement. "I beg pardon," he said, "you are—"

"I am not John Usher."

Waterlow stared, uncomprehending. And Usher said quickly: "I suppose you think me daft. But I am not John. I am his brother Robert. I am certain that Sir Christopher, who knew the reason for my presence here, told no one before his death. Since you are now the head I must now give you a full explanation."

Usher unfolded the story. He told of being summoned here to the Room by Sir Christopher to find his brother shot to death at the foot of the blackboard. He told of the plot to trap the murderer by his assumption of John's

personality. He told of his adventures with Morgan, with Miss Ainger, and with Cope. And Waterlow grew solemn, and his little eyes stared unbelievably. He got up, and his body appeared to be shaken and trembling.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Of course I had no idea of any of this, and I'm certain Sir Reginald knows nothing." Then he said pointedly: "The same hand that struck down John must have killed Sir Christopher."

"I think we can reasonably assume that," replied Usher.

Waterlow reseated himself; his thin, twitching fingers drummed on the desk. "This is a grave situation," he said. "Does anyone here suspect that you are not John Usher?"

"No, I think they all accept me as John," said Usher. "I've had those encounters with Morgan and Cope, and they haven't a suspicion, unless, of course, one is guilty. And in the same light the situation is safe enough with Miss Ainger. She was, in fact, rather in love with John, and she still is, which I have richly discovered."

"One man suspects," announced Waterlow.

"Pray who?"

"Bevan."

Waterlow related the incident of the little finger. "And quite frankly I went straight to Sir Christopher about it. I repeated Bevan's story of the chess game, and the queer way the dog acted. But when you came out of the office your hand was bandaged, so I couldn't check. Now, of course, I understand. Rather clever of you to keep your left hand bound." Waterlow smiled dryly.

"And does Bevan still suspect?"

"There's still a doubt at the back of his mind, but he's a harmless cove, and I don't think that need worry us."

Usher watched Waterlow's face closely. Lines of deep concern and gravity limned it in the half-light from the window. His voice was low and eager.

"Usher, you must remain here in the Room and carry on! We must, between us, run this spy to earth and see him on his way to the Tower. Your brother's life is ended, cruelly and brutally; Sir Christopher is gone. Now that I have been made the head, perhaps I may go next. But those are what I call incidental considerations. The vital thing—the only thing—is our work here: the successful deciphering of the intercepts. You, as an Intelligence officer, can vitally serve us if you can stop this deadly interference with our job. Have I your promise?"

"I have a feeling," said Usher slowly, "that I will stop all interference with your job in a few days."

"Excellent!" said Waterlow.

He shook Usher's hand in a warm comradely grasp; and the Intelligence man was impressed with his upsurge of fervent emotion.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MISSION TO WARSAW

N

EXT

EXT day, at exactly four o'clock, the door of the room of the First Sea Lord opened, and Sir Reginald Meade came out of the Admiralty inner sanctum with six of the highest ranking officers in the British services. There was General Sir Evelyn Holt, tall, straight and iron-gray; Lieut.-Colonel Jardine, of the Army; Admiral Basil Langley and another high official of the Royal Navy; and Sir Philip Gough and Undersecretary Borden of the Royal Air Force.

Behind that door, during the past hour, the route of a plane had been charted with the greatest secrecy.

The plane would take off from an English airdrome at seven o'clock, in just three hours. It would fly north through the English night to the tip of Scotland, swing out over the North Sea, and approach Poland from the

north. It was a mission subject to the greatest danger; if word got to the Germans, any desperate effort would be resorted to, to bring the plane down, either in flames or to a safe landing so that these men could be captured.

As Sir Reginald shook hands with the officers and wished them Godspeed, he issued a grave warning.

"Converge upon the 'drome from various directions," he ordered. "And singly. Not together. And not a word to anyone."

The men understood the gravity of that warning. Nazi spies were still at large in England. Hundreds had infiltrated with the thousands of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria; and the Scotland Yard dragnet had not yet gathered them all in.

Within twenty minutes the men had left the Admiralty, singly. They went off in various directions, in cars and taxis.

SIR REGINALD picked up the telephone and dialed Room 40.

"Waterlow? Come over, will you?"

Waterlow crossed over from the Old Building and was ushered into Sir Reginald's office.

"Waterlow," said Sir Reginald, "the German intercepts during the next few hours are of the gravest importance to us. I can't reveal why. But I want them deciphered immediately and the transcripts sent to me every fifteen minutes. I shall remain here in my office until two o'clock in the morning. I want you to keep your staff on and let me know if there is any change in their code."

"Certainly, sir," said Waterlow. "There has been no change in the code for forty-eight hours."

"That's good! I hope to hell there'll be no change tonight!"

Waterlow caught the deep note of anxiety in his chief's voice.

"We'll be prepared for any change," he said. He returned at once along the corridors to the Old Building and the Room.

The entire staff was there—except Usher.

Usher had left the Room half an hour before. A call from Intelligence had summoned him. A message from the Admiralty had announced the secret taking off of the plane at seven on its mission to Warsaw. As a precaution against a leak of this important military secret every road converging on the 'drome at Romford was placed under rigid surveillance. Until seven o'clock no car, lorry, bicycle, or vehicle of any kind, or any civilian, would be allowed within a quarter of a mile of the 'drome. The six officers had been given the word—"Seven"—that would pass them through the cordon.

Usher deployed a group of operatives. There was a narrow valley between Qualley Wood and the Ridge; here armed men guarded its hollows. The wood was combed; the shaggy banks of the Colehill beaten through; and other officers watched from the hedges. The country to the north was sparse and open, a bit of dreary moorland, with only sheep and a sprinkling of cattle; but even the cowherds were challenged, scrutinized, and turned back. . . . Immediately after seven o'clock, as the plane knifed away into the dusk, Usher, his work done, would rush back to London.

It had been a grueling day. Hundreds of intercepts had come in, and the cryptographers had attacked them until they were nearly exhausted, with nerves frayed.

With an anxiety he had not felt until this moment, Waterlow turned to the latest batch of intercepts. There was the *thud-thud* of the pneumatic shuttle, and a metal carrier, shot up from the telegraphs below, dropped into the waiting basket. Waterlow opened it and extracted a dozen typed messages. He spread them out on Mason's wide desk. One swift glance at them and he recoiled as

it electricity had passed through him. The Nazis had changed the code. Instantly he faced the staff.

"They've changed the code!" he announced. The men and Miss Ainger paused, silent. "I can't tell you *why*," he said, "but it's vital that we break it down at once. No time out for dinner. I'll have coffee and sandwiches brought in. I don't want anyone to leave the Room."

Bevan, Cope and Colonel Hedley began immediately a study of the messages. Mason and Miss Ainger checked over several of the typed yellow sheets. It was evident from a superficial study that it was a code, or cipher, of a different character, and they were baffled. It presented itself as a challenge to their already tired minds.

The first step must be to segregate the characters. Cope began chalking up columns of figures on the blackboard, while Waterlow went quickly into his private office to telephone the news across to Sir Reginald.

The information came as a shock, a bit of rotten news, to the Admiralty man. His orders were sharp:

"Break it down! I must read the messages within an hour."

On the big blackboard in the Room were now three columns of figures. The first column read:

791030
60102
31212
81991
70902
21212
33382
02441
87860

Waterlow joined the group at the board. He explained, "The messages were sent without address or signatures, on a high arc."

Quickly Bevan and Cope compiled a frequency table of each group figure—thus:

91030 occurred 5 times.
02441 occurred 3 times.
33382 occurred 3 times.
00198 occurred 2 times.

A studied glance at the frequencies, and Waterlow came to one conclusion.

The smallest number in the message was 00124; the largest was 91030. That indicated, almost certainly, that the code had approximately 92,000 words, an unusually high number.

"Of these, we must allow for between a thousand and two thousand variants," Waterlow warned. "And a high percentage of nulls."

Also, Waterlow pointed out, there were seventeen numerical groups, and one group occurred five times. He assumed, as a working basis, that the code was in German, and for the moment dispensed with the language tests. The tests based upon a German newspaper in the files gave BE as the most frequent word. But it was hardly possible that the first word of this message was BE. The other frequencies, in order, were IN, TO, WITH, WILL, BY and IS.

"Can it be a dictionary code?" suggested Miss Ainger. "If it is, then the smallest figure group, 01124, represents a word beginning with A, and 91030, the largest, represents a word beginning with W, Y or Z."

"No," said Waterlow, "that won't help us. If this is a dictionary code, the first three figures of each group will indicate the page. This seems impossible, because we have numbers 91 and 82 standing for the lines, and in the average dictionary we seldom have more than sixty or sixty-five words to a page. No, we must rule that out."

"Then there's number 7 preceding the first figure group. What does that mean? Probably the indication

of a specific code. It might stand for *Code No. 7*. But that won't help us either." Waterlow was puzzled.

But the code must be solved.

The men, and Miss Ainger, threw themselves into the work, forcing their tired brains to alertness. Cope continued chalking up the figures. He tabulated the last two figures throughout. He tabulated each prefix and suffix. The others studied the terminations: words with a common termination which might signify S. . . . For an hour—two hours—long after the allotted time, those master brains drove on. At the end of the third hour, haggard, nerves jangled, they still struggled with the maze of numerals and letters. The code defeated them.

AT exactly seven o'clock Sir Reginald Meade left his office in the Admiralty and went to Room 40. His face was grim and set, and he was laboring under great strain, but he held his emotions under tight control. He was responsible for the lives of six of Britain's greatest army, navy, and air force men. The plane had left. A minute ago it had lifted from the 'drome, and set its course through the murky haze northward toward the tip of Scotland, and was now mounting to twenty thousand feet and riding swiftly through the adventurous night. The men in the cabin, with windows blacked out, were closely gathered in an earnest group, poring over maps, planning, planning. The pilot was Bill Larkworthy, one of Britain's aces; Hardy, the co-pilot beside him, sat silent with the radio earphones attached; and the steward, who had packed the bags in the luggage compartment, was pouring hot tea from a thermos. He was a thin, weedy man, wearing a white monkey jacket, and had been for years on the London-Berlin run.

For the lives of all these men Sir Reginald felt an acute personal responsibility. Anything might happen. The odds were desperately against their getting safely through to Warsaw. For hours now, while the plane was in the air, he would suffer a sharp and poignant suspense beneath the calm of his official presence.

In his hand he bore a fresh group of intercepts which he had just got from the telegraphs. These he handed to Waterlow.

"There," he said, "is the same message—repeated four times within the last hour. It has some urgent meaning." Then after a second's pause, "We must read it, Waterlow!"

Waterlow gestured toward the cryptographers at the blackboards, concentrating, near exhaustion, with nerves raw and jangly. "We will!" he answered.

"I'll be waiting in my room," said Sir Reginald. "Call me the minute you get it."

Three hours later, at ten o'clock, Miss Ainger showed signs of cracking up. The code messages were still not deciphered. The men were straining every ounce of power, but were still baffled, defeated. It was as if those yellow sheets hurled a silent defiance at the Room, as if they possessed a demoniac power to defy and frustrate. Their very silence conveyed a sinister and deadly spirit of the enemy. An uncanny, terrifying spirit, which John Usher had felt and understood.

Waterlow urged Miss Ainger to go home. She was pale, nervous, trembling. The tearing grind of the work, exacting every iota of her strength, was wearing her down, so when Waterlow suggested that she rest for a few hours and then come back, she agreed. She had driven herself to the utmost for twelve hours; she felt physically upon the point of collapse. Morgan went out with her and called a taxi, and she was soon speeding in the direction of home.

But the urgency of the situation in Room 40 troubled her, obsessed her. As if in a confused delirium her brain went on wrestling with the problem that now loomed with mountainous invincibility.

The cab was passing John Usher's house at Lancaster Gate. She saw a light in the living-room windows. She stopped the cab suddenly, paid the fare, and a moment later had rung the doorbell.

When Robert Usher opened the door and saw her face, "Sudan, what is it?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm all right. Just fagged, that's all. . . . Hello, David!"

"Hello, Miss Ainger. I hope you're all right."

"Yes, of course I am, David."

"Come in," Usher said. "You've been overdoing. Come over here and rest." He helped her across to the couch. Then he rang for Libby.

"Libby," he said to the housekeeper, "fetch some sandwiches and coffee for Miss Ainger."

"Thank you, John," said Miss Ainger, "but I can't stay. I just came to tell you that they've changed the code again and we can't decipher. We've been at it since four o'clock."

"I'm not surprised," said Usher. "I expected something—"

"Whatever it is, it's frightfully serious. Sir Reginald has been waiting minute by minute for the transcript."

Usher asked, "How do the symbols run?"

"Groups of five numbers, mostly. The first group is preceded by a 7. Mr. Waterlow is certain that the 7 indicates their code series. I think it may be a dictionary code. But nobody agrees."

They became instantly silent as Libby brought in a tray of sandwiches and a pot of coffee.

"Oh, Libby, thanks; it's awfully good of you!" said Miss Ainger. Usher moved over the cocktail table.

"Now, go ahead and eat," he said.

Libby went out again.

THE sandwiches were delicious, and Miss Ainger relished them. Usher poured the coffee. But the problem of the Room weighed heavily on her mind.

"John, you must go back to the Room at once," Miss Ainger urged earnestly. "They need you desperately. We're all ready to drop, and you're fresh, and you can work it out."

Robert Usher did not answer immediately. He paced slowly before Miss Ainger on the couch. He knew the reason for Sir Reginald's anxiety, and his imperative order that the code be broken quickly. But he knew, too, that an order, no matter how mandatory, could not affect the final breaking down of the code.

"There's one thing I'm afraid of, Sudan," he said, and he spoke as John might have spoken. "It is, not that they will use a dictionary code—we can break that down—but that they will use a work of fiction. When that happens, we'll never crack it until we hit upon the particular book. And then, of course, they may have a score of books and switch from one to another before this war is over. . . . Take that number 7. What does it stand for? If we knew, we could crack the code in quick order."

Usher's words left Miss Ainger breathless, and filled with a sinister fear. She felt in that moment something of the nebulous, distant power of the enemy striking at her, the same feeling that John Usher had had. It was a terrible undercurrent, an invisible portent, like a hand clutching, and its very silence closed in with ghostly terror.

David had been listening intently as he sat beside Miss Ainger on the couch.

"It sounds like a code that Carl gave me at the St. Francis School," he ventured quietly.

Miss Ainger smiled lovingly. "Yes, David," she said. "Did you have a code with one of your school friends?"

"With Carl. Carl Eberling. He was my best friend. We were going to write to each other by using a code."

"Yes, dear. It was going to be loads of fun, wasn't it?"
"I suppose so. I haven't used it yet," said David. "We were going to use a book—a story-book—and use numbers for the pages and the number of the word. Our code was number 7 too."

Suddenly Miss Ainger paused in the midst of eating a sandwich. She stared, transfixed.

"David!" she exclaimed. "Tell me more about your code. Was this number 7 the number of the particular book you were going to use?"

"Yes, it was."

"Did your code numbers look like this, David?" Quickly Miss Ainger got an old envelope and pencil from her handbag and scribbled a series of numbers.

"Yes, like that."

"David, what was the name of the story-book?"

"It was a book that Carl had. It belonged to his father. You know, Carl's father is in the Cipher Bureau in Berlin."

"What was the book, David?"

"It was called, 'Little Man, What Now?'"

Miss Ainger looked up swiftly at Usher.

"John, I think that may be it!" she said, striving to control the emotion in her voice.

Robert Usher turned to the lad with a new interest.

"David, tell me about this code. How did your little friend Carl get it?"

"Carl told me he got it from his father's desk in Berlin one day," David answered. "His father was Herr Friedrich Eberling, and boy, was he a Nazi!"

"David, have you this code—or the book?"

"Carl explained about the code. But he gave me the book. I think it's in my bag."

"Run up and get it, David."

David scampered away up the staircase.

Suddenly Robert Usher burst into laughter. He shook with uncontrolled mirth.

"John, what *are* you laughing at?" cried Miss Ainger with deep seriousness.

Usher subsided. "Well, you know we have a close check on the Nazi Cipher Bureau," he said. "During the last war the head of the German code room was a Colonel Eitel Eberling. For fifteen years Colonel Eberling held his position, until 1933, when he died. He reorganized the department, and devoted the years to codes which he felt we stupid British could never crack. And he trained his son Friedrich to be an expert cryptographer. We know about Friedrich, and we know that he's a damned clever fellow. He happens to be the father of Carl, David's little friend. Now do you see? . . . Carl has poked his little Nazi nose into his father's desk and come upon his secret code-book, and he seized upon this No. 7 code to use as a boyish prank. No. 7 happens to be the novel 'Little Man, What Now?' I know the book; it's by Hans Fallada, and was popular in Germany and in this country in the early '30s. In fact, I read it." He paused, and again chuckled with deep mirth. "Good God, what a beautiful piece of dramatic irony!"

Miss Ainger felt a sudden elation, a sharp quickening of her flagging spirit.

"John, you must go to the Room at once!" she urged. "There isn't a minute to be lost."

David returned, but without the book.

"I can't think what could have happened," he said. "Carl gave it to me, and I thought it was in my bag. I've dumped everything out, but it isn't there."

"All right, David, I'll get a copy," said Usher. "It must be the German original. I can find it in the British Museum." He got his hat and coat.

"I'll stay here and finish my coffee and talk to David," said Miss Ainger.

"Good night," said Usher. "Lucky you dropped in—perhaps. We shall see."

"Good night, John." She rose quickly and her arms were around him. She kissed him. "Good luck! I shall be dying to know."

When he had gone, Miss Ainger threw her arms around David. "Oh, David! David!" she cried. "I love you, dear—and it may be a wonderful thing you've done!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A COMPLEX AND DANGEROUS MAN



R. McQUALITY stood in the portico under the towering smudged columns of the British Museum and jangled his keys. He listened to what Robert Usher said about the book. It was so dark that neither man could see the other's face. Mr. McQuality shook his head disapprovingly. "Sorry, sir," he said; "the Museum is locked. We open again in the morning at ten o'clock."

"Then you'll have to unlock the doors. I must have this book—and at once."

"Sorry, sir," began Mr. McQuality, "but—"

"Government orders. Intelligence," said Robert Usher. Mr. McQuality stared in the darkness. "Yes sir, I understand; but I have no authority—"

"Who has the authority?"

"Lord Steyne or Mr. Abbecraig—"

"Where is the telephone?"

The two men trudged across the gravel of the forecourt to the gate-house.

Usher put through a call to Lord Steyne's residence. He heard a servant's voice.

"Is His Lordship at home?" Usher asked.

"His Lordship is not very well and has gone to bed. Will you leave a message, sir?"

Usher stated his business: he was Robert Usher of the Intelligence; it was vitally necessary that he enter the library to obtain a certain book in the Government's interest, and would His Lordship give such permission to Mr. McQuality, in charge?

In less than five minutes the servant returned to the other end and conveyed the required permission to the commissionaire.

The keys jangled; the great doors opened; and they entered the bleak, dark, high-vaulted hall. Usher followed the man through the darkness, their footsteps ringing on the stone floor. As they approached the reading-room, Mr. McQuality swerved suddenly to the right, his keys rattled again, and he opened a door and switched on a light.

"This way, sir."

Usher stood in a steep, narrow cañon of books. The cañon stretched away endlessly, and rose to dizzying heights. Thousands upon thousands of books were stacked upon the metal shelves. Every published book in the world found its way here. "Little Man, What Now?" must be here, too, somewhere.

"Will you follow me, sir?"

Usher moved forward over the steel duck-board. The cañon curved. He went on and on.

"Here, sir, is the German section."

Usher scanned the shelves. The fiction shelves were shoulder high. He found the F's. . . . Fallada . . .

A sudden leaden emotion gripped him. There was a space between two books. "Little Man, What Now?" was missing.

"Damn!"

"What is it, sir? Is it out?"

"Yes! Where else could it be?"

"Well, really, sir," sighed Mr. McQuality, "I wouldn't know. They hand me the keys and tell me nothing."

"All right, McQuality. Thank you for your trouble." Usher moved briskly back along the metal duck-boards, slipped the commissionaire a half-crown, and left the building.

There was Charing Cross Road with its many bookshops. There was a chance—a good chance—that the book would be there, in one of the shops featuring foreign publications, if only he could get his hands on it.

It was getting late. Nine o'clock. He heard the far-off boom of chimes crashing over the city. The cryptographers in Room 40 were sweating and toiling, trying to break down the cipher. They would toil on and on, in futile agony, if his theory of the code was correct. . . . And the military plane winging its way toward Warsaw. If those Nazi messages were directed against its flight, disaster hovered in the winds that tailed it. Six lives, so mighty in the British orbit of war, so near to death!

A taxi whirled Usher across the West End, from Great Russell Street into Charing Cross Road.

Black night shrouded the street. Left and right, it was congested with bookshops, closed for the night. Not a light was visible. People moved slowly in the blackout, groping their way toward Cambridge Circus, or lower toward the Strand. It was like a city of the dead.

It was obvious to Usher that he would have to dig out the owners of the shops, to get in. Some lived in the rear, others had gone home hours ago. He walked along the pavement and studied the names. There was Foyles, but their foreign department was limited. No, a smaller shop that specialized in Continental books would be surer. Livix's. No, they featured Russian literature and art. Bertolini's—Duvivier's—Isaiah Thom. . . . Isaiah Thom! Usher knew of the little Hamburg Jew. He had had a bookshop in Germany when Hitler came to power, but had sold out and come to England, and established himself here in the book world of Charing Cross Road. Of all the shops, Usher swiftly concluded, Thom's would most likely possess the precious volume.

He crossed the street and rapped on Thom's door. The man slept in the back portion of the premises where he lived alone and kept house. If he were out, Usher would call a bobby and force the door. . . . He knocked again, long and insistently. A faint light flashed on behind the rear partition. It was on less than a minute, then flashed off again. Usher waited impatiently. The man was probably in bed, and was dressing. Presently his footsteps sounded faintly across the floor. A chain rattled; a key clicked in the lock; the door opened a few inches.

"Mr. Thom—"

"Yes, vat is it?"

"I've come to get a book—"

"Can't you see I'm closed?" retorted the shopkeeper irritably. "Come tomorrow—"

"I've got to have this book tonight. Let me in and I'll explain."

"Tomorrow!" returned Thom.

Usher shoved his foot into the doorway.

"This is Government business," he said. "I'm from the Intelligence."

"Oh, vell, vat is it?" said Thom, now conciliatory. He opened the door, and Usher stepped inside.

"Better pull your shades. Darken the front. I want to look over your German books," said Usher.

Frightened, Thom quickly drew down the shades.

"Now let's have one light," said Usher. "Not too much light."

Thom switched on a twenty-watt lamp. In its light Usher saw the little Jew more clearly. He was bald-headed, wore thick-lensed glasses, was collarless, and his shoe laces dangled. The glasses dwindled his eyes to pin-points and gave him a staring, uncanny aspect. He stared in silence at the Intelligence officer.

"Vat book?" he asked suddenly.

"You brought over a lot of German first editions," said Usher. "Have you a copy of Hans Fallada's 'Little Man, What Now?'"

There was a pause, and Thom did not answer.

"Well, have you got it?" Usher repeated, sharply.

For answer, Thom waved a hand toward the bookshelves behind Usher. He shrugged in uncertainty.

"Are these your German editions?"

"Ja."

Usher turned his back upon the book-dealer and scrutinized the rows of books. The light was poor, and he thrust his head forward to read the titles. All were in German. There were works of Goethe, Schiller, and on the shelf above, of the popular novelists. Usher's bandaged left hand hung limply at his side; with his right hand he traced quickly along the shelf, passing title after title with feverish eagerness. For tense seconds that feeling of cutting disappointment swept over him as he failed to spot the book; then suddenly, with a sharp exaltation of spirit, his breath whistled from his lips. "Ah!" He snapped the book from the shelf, opened it, flicked its pages. Within its text lay hidden the enigma of life or death. "I have it, Thom!" he said. "How much do I owe you?"

As he spoke, he turned and faced Isaiah Thom. Already the Jew was upon him, his eyes behind the thick lenses narrow slits with the dynamics of death. The man's arm drove down fiercely. Usher felt the impact of ivory and steel. Then a brilliance and darkness settled over the room.

A CANDLE was burning inside a tin upon a table. It gave forth a shivering dull glow. It cast grotesque black images on the wall. There was a couch in the room, with soiled sheets. Usher lay bound upon the couch. He drifted back, and slowly opened his eyes.

He absorbed the outlines of the room through a swimming mist. A high, heavy bookcase stood beside the couch, overloaded with books, toppling forward. Piles of magazines, tied with stout cords, littered the floor. There was a ladder, a bicycle, a cabinet radio, an alcove with shelves of dishes, a gas stove.

He gazed upward at a tall print of the leaning Tower of Pisa. As he lay under it, it towered above him, toppled, and it seemed to his aching brain that it would crash down upon him. . . . Pisa. He remembered: a hot Italian day, the brown city of red roofs, the white roads of the plain, the green meadows welded into the town wall, the sparkle of the hills of Carrara, and the far, shining curve of the Arno. His eyes remained riveted upon the Campanile. A white miraculous toy. Now yellow with the yellow of old ivory, banded with black. He had climbed it, with its beautiful pillars and rounded arches. Fourteen feet out of perpendicular. He remembered standing under it—the sensation of terror if it crashed down. Now it towered above him again, and the sensation of that other day rushed back upon him. He thought: if it toppled—if it toppled—

He heard voices. He lifted his head from the couch and listened acutely. They were men's voices, one weak and penitent, the other angry and violent.

Said the angry voice: "Why did you do it, Thom? Only a fool would do it. See now what you have done to us!"

Thom's voice was quivering. "But he was the dangerous one. When he found the book, I knew it was something against us."

The first man's voice rose condemningly.

"Fool!" he cried. "You were told never to betray yourself. Now he knows. Now the fat's in the fire."

"I am sorry," whined Thom.

"Where is he?"

"Come this way, Josef."

Josef!

Usher heard the trample of feet over the floor of the shop. The two figures loomed through the pale candle glow and reached the foot of the couch. Josef stood silent and gazed down upon the Intelligence man lying with his hands bound behind his back.

Usher beheld the little restaurant proprietor wrapped in a long dark coat and wearing a black Homburg hat. The faint light flickered across his face. His eyes were filled with infinite regret.

Things were clearing in Usher's brain. After Thom had struck him down with the revolver butt he had dragged him back here and then telephoned to Josef. When Josef got the message he had come posthaste. Now—

"Good evening, Robert Usher," said Josef gently.

"Hello, Josef. We meet again, sooner than I had expected."

"Yes, thanks to this blunderer," said Josef with an acid glance at Thom staring nervously through his heavy lenses. "This is not the way I like things handled—it is *ungeschicht!*"

"Yes, quite," said Usher, forcing a smile, "quite *ungeschicht!*. And now what, Josef?"

Josef sat facing him on the couch. Clearly, he was vitally perturbed.

"Six months, or a year from now," said Josef, "our affairs might have taken a different turn. We might both of us have lived to see the German victory. But now only one of us can celebrate the momentous day. You certainly will not see that day, Usher. Thom's mistake has settled that. I— Well, it will be that or the Tower."

"You understand," he continued quickly with a cavalier smile, "we know all about you, Usher. You are Robert. John was murdered, and you have taken John's place in Room 40 to avenge his death. Or—shall I say?—to perform a noble deed for your England. Either way, your work is doomed."

"You were clever. Take Morgan! You brought him to the Peasant to trap him. But did you? . . . And Cope. You and Cope searched my restaurant, but did you find the English waiter?" For a fleeting instant a sardonic shadow twisted Josef's lips. "That waiter was there. Oh, yes! But an hour later he was dead. We have a way with those who betray us."

He paused. His face again assumed its veil of sadness.

"It is too bad," he said. "All life is sorrow. London is a gracious city, and I had hoped to live here always. I have my little flat near Primrose Hill, and late at night I like to walk there and look down upon the roof of London. I love the lights, and the roar, and the bigness of it! I love to hear Big Ben, and see the twilight coming down over Waterloo Bridge. I love the River, and Kew in spring, and those miles and miles of green grass on Hampstead Heath." His voice was tinged with tenderness. "I shall miss it, Usher, oh, I shall miss it!" Suddenly his face hardened, and his tone became metallic. "And so will you. After tonight. As I will, if they take me to the Tower." He wheeled impulsively and struck Thom across the face. "Because this *Esel* did a stupid thing and broke our lives! I have no choice now, Usher, now that his has happened. It is you or I."

Then to Isaiah Thom: "Bring me the gun."

In the stillness, Usher heard Thom's footsteps moving out into the shop; presently he heard them starting back again.

Josef was smiling vaguely. "So you liked my *pâté*?" he said. "And you enjoyed my cocktails? It is always so. Twice a week the *pâté* is flown from Zagreb. And no restaurant can match my cellar." He sat erect, proudly, as Isaiah Thom moved forward timidly and placed the gun with the ivory mounting in his hand.

In another moment, thought Usher, Thom, moving back, jarred the tin with the candle. The saffron light

blazed across the face of the Tower of Pisa. It leaned far over with its terrifying threat. Usher recoiled along the edge of the couch, and his right foot touched the heavy bookcase. He glanced swiftly up at it, and saw it toppling forward like the Tower. Toppling forward—

He heard the *click* of the trigger. And Josef's silky voice—something about a new day which he, very unfortunately, would never see.

Usher thrust back his foot—a sharp, violent jolt. The bookcase hurtled forward, and Usher sprang aside against the wall. The next second its mahogany weight came down like an umbrella over both men, and they were buried under the avalanche of books. Thom lay unconscious under the weight of the great frame; and Josef, with his Homburg hat crushed far down upon his head, writhed in pain.

Quickly crossing to the candle, Usher held his wrists over the flame, and his thongs parted in a wisp of smoke.

It was the work of minutes to drag the men from under the heavy bookcase and the piles of books. He ripped the cords away from several piles of magazines and bound their wrists securely behind them.

Then taking the candle, he went out into the shop. There was a telephone there. He dialed the Yard and called for Inspector Chambers; and when the Inspector answered—

"This is Usher," he said. "I say, Chambers, I've made rather a haul tonight. Two bundles of rare books tied up in back of Isaiah Thom's bookshop in Charing Cross Road. Come along and pick them up, will you? I'm in rather a hurry, and—"

"Quite, quite!" answered Inspector Chambers. "Rare books. Always interesting. Be right over."

Usher recovered his hat and the precious volume from the floor, blew out the candle, opened the front door, and sauntered out into the cool September night. Room 40 was but five minutes away.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SPY



ROBERT USHER entered Room 40 at a moment of black despair. The mental atmosphere was one of frustration, of desperation. Cope, Mason, Bevan, Colonel Hedley and Waterlow were at the blackboards which were covered with jungles of letters and of numerals. For hours without ceasing the keen brains had battled and speculated and forced themselves until now they were dulled with fatigue, confusion and defeat. The code had beaten them. Cope had his coat off; perspiration trickled down his forehead. Bevan was chewing on his pipe. Mason had brewed some strong tea and was poisoning himself with cup after cup. Colonel Hedley stumped about the Room, his cane *tap-tapping* on the floor with angry impatience. As for Waterlow, he alone seemed calm and controlled, yet a gnawing anxiety limned his gentle, other-world features.

"Reverse the number groups," Cope called out to Waterlow. "Read them to me."

Waterlow read, and Cope chalked up:

03019

20106

21213

until the column was complete.

"Now note the last two numbers straight down the list," Cope croaked, his voice almost gone. "Not one above 58. That fits perfectly—those are the lines."

"That number 7 prefixing the first group: Seven for Saturday. Now divide the dictionary pages into seven groups. Group 7 becomes Group 1 for this message."

Group 1 becomes Group 2. Group 2 becomes Group 3. Group 3—"

Usher joined the group. With a gesture of his right hand he waved the jungle of hieroglyphics on the boards away.

"It's not the dictionary," he said.

The men stared at him in astonishment. He spoke no other word, but nodded toward Waterlow's private office, and Waterlow, with eagerness, followed him in.

"Sir Reginald?" said Usher.

"Sir Reginald is on the phone every twenty minutes," said Waterlow.

"All right. Now listen—" In clipped, terse speech Usher revealed the astonishing things that had happened. The miracle of Friedrich Eberling's son at the St. Francis School, the discovery of the No. 7 code, the adventure with Isaiah Thom, and the precipitate capture of Josef.

WATERLOW listened enrapt; his face became, for the first time, gray and tense. "And Thom gave you a nasty cut on the head," he said, staring at Usher. "It's crusted with blood. Let me wash it."

"Nol no!" protested Usher. "I'm all right. And there isn't time." He held up the German volume. "We've got to dig the meaning of those messages out of this book."

"But your head's in bad shape," insisted Waterlow. "Here, it won't take a minute."

He got a fresh towel out of his cabinet and wetted it from the tap in the basin. He returned to Usher and bathed his head. He cleaned the wound with the tenderness of a mother ministering to her child.

"You really have been through it," he said. "I'm sorry, Usher. You might have been killed. But it's been a good night's work."

Usher smiled.

"We'll know in the next half hour," he said, "if it's been a good night's work. . . . Waterlow, I think you ought to send the others home. They're all played out. Send Morgan home, too. I'll take the message over to Sir Reginald."

The two men went out into the Room, and Waterlow dismissed the men. They protested that they were willing to go on through the night, but Waterlow made it clear that it was not now necessary.

Within five minutes the Room was empty. The big Room with its naked electric lights. It was getting on to midnight. There was an eerie feeling in the emptiness.

First, Usher wiped the chalk off the big central board, using his free right hand. He rubbed it black-gray, clean. He swung his right hand in wide circles; his left dangled, still heavily bandaged and bound. Waterlow seated himself at a desk fronting the blackboard. Before him was the Nazi message and the open volume of "Little Man, What Now?"

Usher's brain attacked like lightning. He chalked up the numbers in the message as Waterlow read them out. He chalked up a second column, reversing them. He called out the pages, and the numbers of the words, and Waterlow checked them.

Working in undertones, Usher began writing down words. Beneath the undercurrent of feverish anticipation, he was outwardly calm. Had he hit upon the key? Would it work out—make sense? The formula would quickly reveal success or failure.

And with failure—what?

What might not depend upon the solution to the Nazi secret?

He thought of Kitchener on the *Hampshire*—torpedoed to death because of a message that remained undeciphered. . . .

He thought of his fellow-countrymen in danger at this hour—on ships at sea, in planes, facing death from the invader. . . . Their lives might depend upon this message.

Minutes passed. . . . Waterlow's voice calling out the numbers. . . . The naked lights beating down on the board, glaring white and cruel. . . . The blood-chilling squeak of the chalk across the board. . . . Waterlow's voice calling out the words. . . . Letters. Letters. Letters. . . . Numbers. Letters. Phrases taking shape. Words. Words—"I have it!" A full minute passed in silence, like death, cut only by the screech of the chalk.

"There it is, Waterlow." His back was to Waterlow. The message stood boldly printed on the board.

Waterlow read:

• DALMATIAN PLANE DUE LEAVE
ENGLISH DROME TONIGHT SEVEN
FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS LUGGAGE

Usher said, still surveying the completed message: "Dalmatian. That means Josef. . . . What do you make of it, Waterlow?" As he spoke he tossed the piece of chalk into the groove and turned to face the head of the Room. He looked straight into the barrel of the revolver in Waterlow's hand. The man's face, sallow and bespectacled, with its mellow other-world look, was transformed: rigid, set, emotionless, like a wax bust. When he spoke it was to give an order in a soft undertone, almost like a woman.

"Rub it out, Usher."

Usher answered him quietly.

"Of course." His right hand picked up an eraser. "You killed John, didn't you? And Sir Christopher Pelt?" Waterlow's voice became harsh, cracked. "Quickly! Rub it out."

Usher turned and faced the board and began erasing the message and the tangle of letters and numbers.

Big Ben began striking. Down at the other end of Whitehall. Deep, explosive booms, as it had on that other night when John died.

The board was soon cleaned, the message wiped out. Usher faced Waterlow again.

Big Ben crashed and thundered. Eight—nine—ten. . . . Deafening as it beat on to midnight. Then the reverberations died away, and Usher said:

"But the message is still in my brain."

Waterlow's lips twisted into an amused smile. "But in another minute your brain will cease to function, Usher," he said. "And Sir Reginald will never read that message."

Usher met his twisted smile with his own contemptuous one. "You're great people, you Nazis, when you've got guns in your hands. Take away your guns, and what have you? What have you, for Europe, for the world, even for yourselves?"

"That's a brave speech for a man's last speech," said Waterlow.

"Without that gun in your hand, what would you have to say?"

"You are so right, so sure of yourselves, you English. The only man who is right is the man behind a gun. You will soon find that out."

"Tell me," said Usher, "why are you so contemptuous of the English? Aren't you English?"

Waterlow sneered. "English? My father, yes. I was born in Alexandria, and my mother was German. But who knows that? Since it will do no harm to tell you these things now, her name was Liesel Eberling. The only one I have ever loved in this world was my German mother."

"Eberling." Robert Usher smiled amusedly. "Eberling. That's the one point I overlooked, Waterlow. Your mother. Everything else fitted together so perfectly. . . . Colonel Eberling, Friedrich Eberling, Carl Eberling, now Liesel Eberling. The master race." Robert Usher's smile vanished; his tone was replete with loathing. "The master race of beasts," he said.

Deep within him, Waterlow snarled, invisibly. His sallow face writhed with fury. Usher sensed it emotionally, as a cloud shadow that sweeps across an open field. As Waterlow raised his hand with the gun, instantly every part of Usher's brain was occupied, every nerve alive. As Waterlow fired, instantaneously a jet of flame leaped from Usher's bandaged hand; Waterlow's arm cracked and jerked upward; he rolled forward across the desk, sagged like a sack of wet cement, and thumped down onto the floor.

Usher stood over him. With his foot he rolled him over on his back. "I could have killed you," he said, "but I'd like you to live long enough to see the master race go down like that."

Moving alertly, he got a sheet of paper and on its pale blue surface he reproduced the Nazi message. He hurried out and passed along the far dim corridor and came to a door leading to the Admiralty offices. A moment later he stood before Sir Reginald Meade and handed him the Nazi message.

The Admiralty man studied it through long seconds. "Follow instructions—luggage." That could only mean a bomb."

He reached for the telephone. He formulated a radio message to be transmitted to the plane which at that moment should be slipping in out of the darkness over the Baltic with its nose turned toward Warsaw.

"Thank you, Usher," said Sir Reginald. "I hope we can save it, unless it's already blown itself to bits."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE BRASS HATS' PAJAMAS



HE plane, slipping through the velvet black night at fifteen thousand feet over the Baltic, reached the Polish coast and set its course direct for Warsaw. The time was 12:31 British time, which was 1:31 Central European time. Bill Larkworthy, pilot, was at the controls. Hardy, his co-pilot, sat beside him with radio phones to his ears. The plane was blacked out; and no radio message could be dispatched for fear of revealing the ship's position.

So far, as by a miracle, the flight had been uneventful. They had made good time, with a favoring tail wind. They had detected, once, the motors of a Nazi patrol north of Rixhoft, and had swung north and east over the sea almost two hundred miles, finally approaching the terrain again over Brüster Ort. Momentarily they might encounter a cloud of Messerschmitts. It was touch and go, their first great adventure of the war. They had looked forward to tight and daring adventure. Being young, their minds and bodies had accepted it. The one thought in their minds was that it would be a rotten shame to go out so early in the game. And now, the last leg of this flight was packed with death.

"What are the brass hats doing?" Larkworthy asked.

"Reading maps and drinking tea," said Hardy.

"I could do with a bowl myself," said the pilot.

Hardy rose. Suddenly, as he was about to detach the earphones, he picked up a message. It was from the Admiralty. The message was thrice repeated. He scribbled it down on the pad before him and shoved it under Larkworthy's nose. The pilot read it:

URGENT LUGGAGE DANGEROUS
DISCHARGE.

"Wonder what the excitement's about?" Hardy called to Larkworthy, above the engines' roar.

"Better go back and have a look," Larkworthy said.

Hardy slipped off the earphones and passed through the cabin to the luggage compartment in the tail of the ship.

The windows were blacked out. From two wall lights the army, navy and air force men were checking over maps spread out on a makeshift table. General Sir Evelyn Holt and Jardine were actively preparing defense charts; and Undersecretary Borden was outlining the air strength that could be sent over to supplement the Polish defenses.

Hardy opened the door of the luggage compartment and stepped inside. The door closed behind him.

In the racks, strapped firmly, were the bags of the officers—about a dozen pieces. Hardy's eyes saw them but vaguely; what arrested his gaze and caused his nerves to snap taut was the steward. He started as if an electric current had poured through him as Hardy confronted him. He had discarded his white monkey jacket and was wearing his gray tweed civilian coat and was in the act of strapping his parachute to his body. That meant escape. Readiness to leap from the plane. Why?

"What are you doing?" Hardy shouted.

The steward did not answer. He backed two feet against the wall, and Hardy saw the flash of a revolver. But there was no time to level it and fire. Hardy thrust himself forward and was at the fellow's throat. His left hand gripped the steward's gun-arm, and, convulsively locked in what he knew would be a life-or-death struggle, he fought to save the plane and the lives aboard. It might be a matter of minutes; the steward had set the fatal moment, and was ready to leap from the ship. It could not long be delayed. Hardy's brain was fearfully alive: he must overcome the fellow, fling open the door and dump the luggage, piece by piece, overboard. The steward writhed from under him, his flesh tensed like a madman, and his fingers twisted into Hardy's throat. Time was Hardy's enemy. The seconds were ticking by. It was a question of whether he would be in time. . . .

Miss Ainger had been unable to sleep, and had lain awake staring up at the impenetrable darkness of her bedroom ceiling while numbers and letters revolved fantastically through her brain. Her pride in her position, and her determination not to break under strain, would have forced her back to the Room, but Waterlow had telephoned her not to come. She judged by that, that John Usher had found the German book and cracked the code. She was about to reach out for the telephone and call the house in Lancaster Gate when she heard the door-bell of her flat ring. She felt certain that it must be John. She rose and hastily pulled a dressing-robe around her, stepped into her mules, fluffed out her mass of cornelian hair, went into the hall and opened the door.

"Sudan—" said Robert Usher.

"Oh, come in, John. I'm so glad you came. I haven't been able to sleep."

She lighted the pale green candles in the candelabrum in her sitting-room, and poked up the fire. She asked anxiously: "Did you break it down? What was the message?"

Robert looked at her. She was standing with the glow of the awakening fire limning her features, its light enriching her red hair which softly framed her pale face. "Sudan," he said, "a terrible thing has happened."

"Why, John, what—"

To her he was John, but in a few moments she would know the truth. First, about Waterlow.

"Sudan, there's been a spy in the Room. A subtle and dangerous man, placed there to destroy our work. I trapped him tonight, and he's on his way to the Tower."

"A spy, John?" She could not believe.

"Waterlow."

She listened, silent and transfixed, while Robert related the story of suspicion, death and final detection. "I think that Waterlow had been prepared for this job for many years. His father was an Englishman, but his mother was a German woman who hated England, and Waterlow loved his mother. It was a simple matter for

his cunning brain to formulate an acceptable background; and his distinguished work in the British Museum was the 'Open Sesame' to Room 40."

Robert glanced sharply at his wrist-watch.

"At this moment," he said, "there's a plane with six of England's highest ranking officers on its way to Warsaw. That plane is in grave danger. God knows if it will reach its destination."

"But, John, this is all so incredible!"

He answered her: "I am not John."

Already confused and shaken, she heard his words, his strange and meaningless words. Vaguely Miss Ainger said, "I—I don't understand—"

"I'd give anything to spare you this," he said, "but you've got to know. John was shot to death by Waterloo last Monday night. I am Robert. I took his place to discover the spy. I did that tonight, and now my work in Room 40 is finished."

"Robert!"

The name came from her lips softly, like a moan. She was no longer the cool, self-possessed young woman he had known. Suddenly she had become weakly feminine, frightened, trembling. She stared into his face and uttered a low cry from deep within her. Her face, in the candlelight, was white and stunned.

"I didn't know—I didn't dream," she said. She thought of David. "Does David know?"

"Yes, I told David. He's been an admirable little soldier. Poor lad, he's pretty well broken up, but he never showed it. He played his part in this affair, and never once betrayed his feelings."

"Dear, dear David," said Miss Ainger.

"Sudan, I want to ask you something. Please don't misunderstand me. Just tell me frankly: why did you swear in your credentials that you'd never been in Germany?"

Miss Ainger was silent a moment, then, "Robert, did you suspect me?"

"No, actually I didn't. But I had to check on you and Cope and Morgan when you showed that startled surprise when I entered the Room that morning. . . . Well?"

"I was so anxious to get into the Room," explained Miss Ainger. "I felt I belonged there—that it was my work, the thing I could do best in the war. I was afraid they might reject me, and as I thought it really unimportant I omitted to tell them." She thought of her adventure with Kobeler. "Oh, I can understand a lot of things now. Kobeler. . . . You knew he lied, didn't you? That he said he'd been with me at the 'Peasant' out of revenge—his warped idea of revenge?"

"Yes, I suspected that."

SHE moved back and forth before the fire, her slim hands clenched. "I loved John," she said.

"We both loved him," Robert answered. "It's going to be hard on David for awhile, but I'm going to have him live with me, and I shall devote my life to making him happy."

She looked at Robert appealingly. "I'm sorry I ever went into Room 40," she said. "Now—every day—I shall have a vision of John sitting there at that empty desk."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Robert. "The Room needs you, now more than ever." His voice was happy and cheerful. "You know, Sudan, the men thought you'd never stick it—that you'd crack up and let them down. So far you've acted like a damn' good sport. Now—are you going to prove them right, or are you going to prove them wrong? Come, Sudan, my dear—"

"You know," she answered in that fine, brave way of hers, "that I shall prove them wrong."

Her spirit moved him, and aroused his man's feelings for her. He reached out and took her hands in his.

"We've both got our jobs," he said. "You in Room 40, and I in the Intelligence. This thing is going on for many years. But there'll come a day, as certain as the first day of spring, when it will be over. And that will be the beginning. We'll all have to strangle the dead years behind us and do our part to build something new and fine that the little fellows, like David, when they grow up can be proud of. . . . Sudan—"

She met his gaze unflinchingly.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "Do you have to ask, Robert? I want to be part of the victory!"

THE steward lay on the floor of the luggage compartment with a gash across his forehead from which the blood trickled down his face. Hardy finished binding him with the ropes from his parachute. He lay trussed up and breathing convulsively, but helpless.

The next moment the co-pilot unlocked the door and thrust it open against the driving wind. Now, piece by piece, he began throwing the luggage out. Vuitton suitcases, Gladstone bags, two attaché cases, a brand-new pig-skin bag—all went overboard into the night, one by one, with extreme caution. In one was the deadly bomb.

Down hurtled the pieces, into great dark open fields, into village streets, into a small lake, on the side of a mountain dense with firs.

An ammunition train, with its six rear coaches congested with Nazi soldiers moving up to the front, skirted the mountain, roared out of a tunnel, and headed for the open country, south.

In one of the coaches, sitting, lying down, and standing, closely massed together, were a hundred soldiers of the master race. Blond, olive-clad, heavy-booted, they listened to the savage roar of the Fuehrer's voice bursting from the radio at one end of the coach. With each strident bellow they cried out, "Heil!" "Heil!" and "Heil!" again, roaring from their throats, their eyes ablaze, the blood pounding through their veins. The ringing of the coach wheels over the invaded Polish rails rose in a diapason of sound, brutal and metallic, into which that pounding voice gonged and beat. The master race!

The suitcase with the bomb struck—blasted downward through the roof of the first ammunition car. The car disintegrated into an inferno of explosion and flame. One explosion set another, until the whole string of cars was blown to fragments under an umbrella of orange fury. All along the line, like a writhing snake, fire and smoke and torrential explosions rocketed to the skies. And then the burst sheathed outward, ripped through the coach packed with the *Heiling* flower of the race—while the Fuehrer's voice clanged on amidst the flame and terror. . . .

Hardy jammed the door shut. With his foot he rolled the steward over on his belly. He reached down and tested the ropes. Not a chance of his working loose. Trussed up and helpless, like an animal in a net.

Hardy entered the cabin and banged the luggage door shut behind him. The officers had folded the maps and were reclining sleepily in their seats. One of the lights had been put out; in the faint glow of the other the men glanced up casually at Hardy.

"Are we on time?" General Sir Evelyn Holt asked.

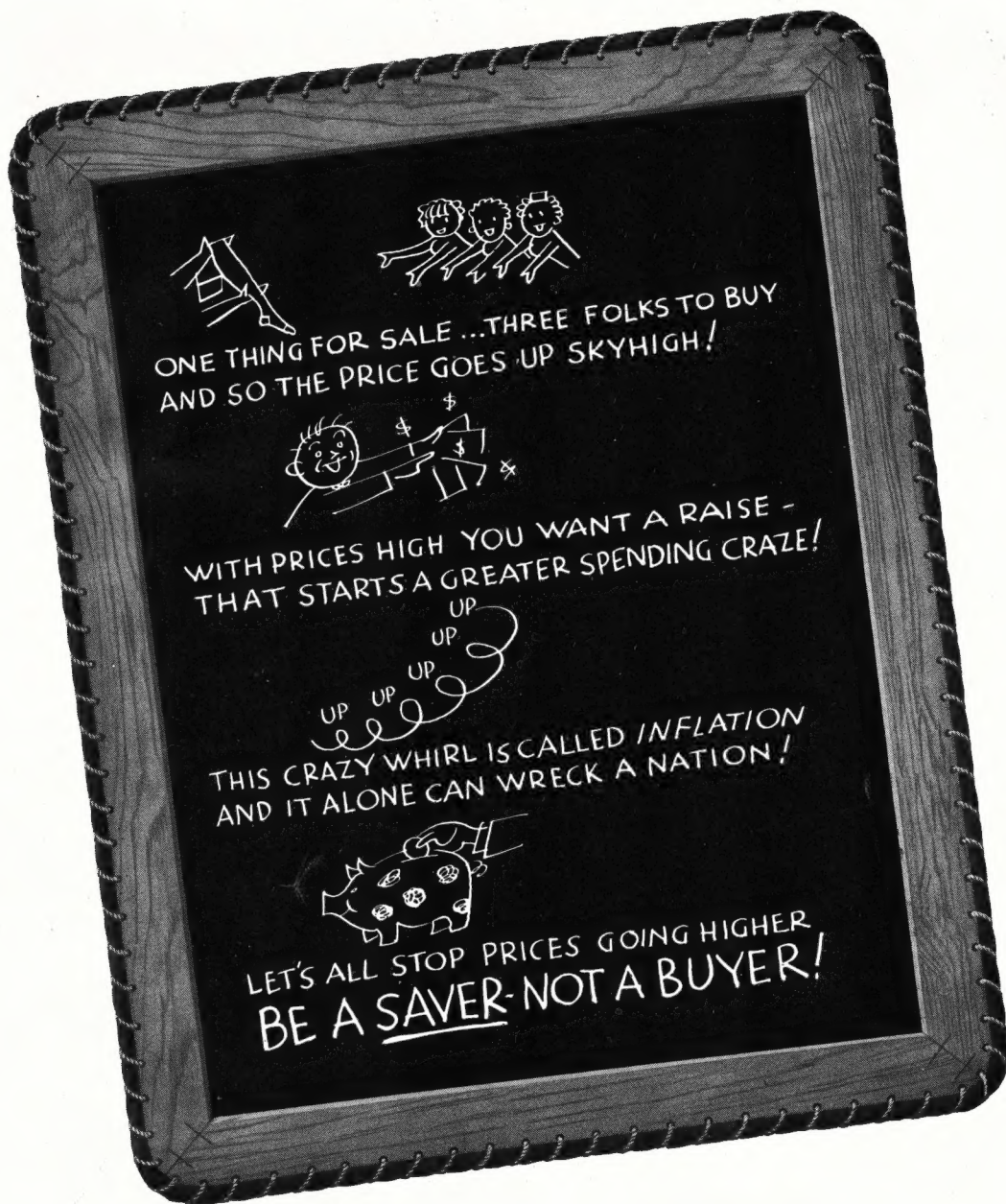
"We're an hour late," replied Hardy. "Had to climb back over the sea at Rixhoft to avoid the coast patrol."

The Undersecretary of the Air Force stirred sleepily. "Beastly dull trip," he murmured, "beastly dull."

"Oh, yes sir," replied Hardy with a pleasant smile, and passed through to the pilots' compartment and resumed his seat beside Larkworthy.

"What happened?" shouted Larkworthy.

"Tragedy, Bill!" answered Hardy with a grin. "The brass hats have lost their pajamas!"



Seven things you should do:

1. Buy only what you really need	2. Pay no more than ceiling prices... buy rationed goods <u>only</u> with stamps	3. Pay off old debts and avoid making new ones	4. Support higher taxes ... pay them willingly	5. Provide for the future with adequate life insurance and savings	6. Don't ask more money for goods you sell or work you do	7. Buy all the War Bonds you can afford - and keep them
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Keep prices down...use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without

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